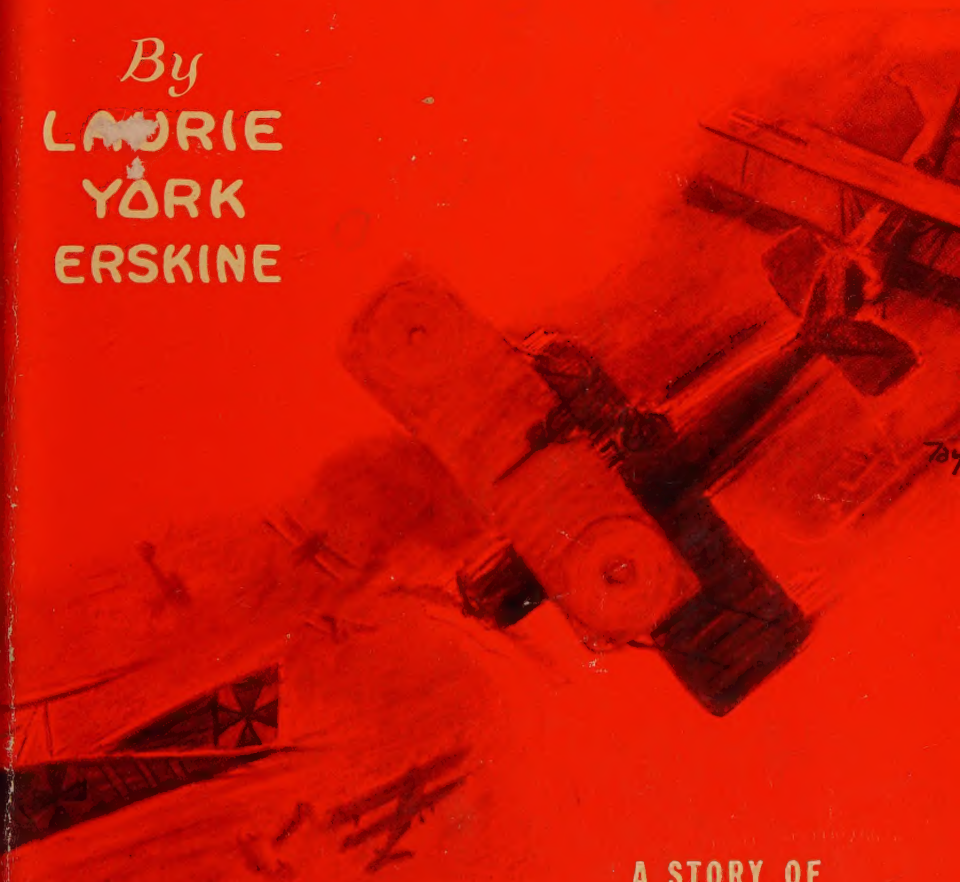
RENFREW RIDES THE SKY

By

LAURIE YORK ERSKINE



A STORY OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN "MOUNTIES"

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RENFREW RIDES THE SKY

By
LAURIE YORK ERSKINE
Author of
RENFREW OF THE ROYAL MOUNTED

Renfrew, Laurie York Erskine's popular hero, here engages in a new series of adventures—in France in the Royal Flying Corps.

Thrilling experiences they are, too—Renfrew's and those of his flying buddies—when every take-off is a challenge to death. There are a series of breath-taking battles in the air, narrow escapes and forced landings on enemy territory, and all the hazards and crises constantly met with by the riders of the sky. The account of a duel with a German ace, when Renfrew's cool nerve and flying skill are put to the supreme test, carries the narrative to a thrilling climax.

Readers of *Renfrew of the Royal Mounted* and *Renfrew Rides Again* will enjoy seeing the famous Renfrew as he now appears, a member of the great brotherhood of airmen.

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RENFREW RIDES THE SKY

"Oh, my gosh, Colonel!" was all Hanlon could say.

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BY

LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

GROSSET & DUNLAP
Publishers New York

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TO

RAYMOND BALCH

OF THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS,
WHO FELL, WITH BROKEN WINGS,
TO AN EARTH WHICH HE DEEMED
HIS SACRIFICE WOULD MAKE A
BETTER PLACE TO LIVE IN

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FOREWORD

There was one phase in Renfrew's life which he gave forth grudgingly, a sort of closed book which he seldom opened. Even he himself found it difficult to tell why he so jealously kept that book closed; why he kept those greatest adventures to himself; and it is only from occasional remarks wherewith he turned away every attempt to draw a story from that volume that we are able to gather a hint of why it remained unopened.

"When a man tells war stories," he once protested, "it is as though he showed off his medals; as though he strutted in uniform. There's pleasure in the telling of stories, but so many good men were killed in the war that those particular stories are not for a man to tell. They don't belong to any man who came through —they're dead men's tales. Understand what I mean?"

At another time he made an even more sharply pointed objection.

"The war was an adventure all right," he said, "but chiefly, it was a war, and war is a matter of competitive killing on a large scale. That doesn't make a particularly cheerful sort of story."

But, as time went on, that book was occasionally opened, and I think that the reasons why Renfrew gave those brief, vivid glimpses of what the book contained, were two in number. I think that he wished to give the truth regarding sundry matters about which people

cherish sheer illusions; and I think he felt that through these fleeting glimpses of men who could no longer tell their tales, comrades of adventure whose voices he would never hear again might not be forgotten, nor their deeds remain buried in those green spots of England, France and Germany where their young bodies lie.

LAURIE Y. ERSKINE.

Solebury School,
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RENFREW RIDES THE SKY

CHAPTER I

ALL IN THE SAME BOAT

IN the earlier days of the Flying Corps, most of the flyers came in from other branches of the service. West and Bradley, Woolcot, Robinson and Renfrew all transferred from Canadian cavalry units. They went into the war at first as men on leave from the Mounted, and crossed over with the British Columbia Horse. The flying drew them away from the ground with the fascination of a new adventure. Renfrew, for one, took it up because he knew that unless he flew during the war there was little chance of his ever flying at all.

But there was another class of pilot in the old Royal Flying Corps, and it was to this class that Bobby Worden belonged. They called them the Babes in Arms, because they were for the most part youngsters just out of school. The War Office found out very early in the game that a boy of eighteen will fly more recklessly and fight more dashingly in the air than elderly men of twenty-three and twenty-four, and as a result the Babes in Arms soon outnumbered the transfers from seasoned units to such an extent that the veterans

were lucky if they managed to get overseas with them. There was a ghastly tendency on the part of the War Office to keep the cavalry transfers on the flying fields to teach the young idea how to fly.

Bobby Worden, however, was not merely young, he was ridiculously young. He couldn't have been more than seventeen, and he looked rather more like sixteen; but he got through the recruiting office all right, and was listed on the rôle of His Majesty's Cadets of the Royal Flying Corps as a British citizen, eighteen years of age. Considering the fact that he hailed from Louisville, Kentucky, and never got rid of his southern accent, I take it that there was a good deal of fiction mixed up in the terms of his enlistment.

He was fairly tall and very dark, with dark brown eyes that helped him to get away with a great deal for which a less personable individual would have been disciplined even in the Flying Corps. His dark brown cheeks didn't have a suspicion of a whisker on them, and his serious pretension of carefully shaving himself every other day was the first demonstration he gave his comrades of a tendency to weave such fictions as had got him into the service. Another pleasant legend he spun concerned his imaginary adventures upon the motor racing track. He claimed to great distinction in this sport, and became so angry when trapped into high flights of romance regarding his prowess and being applauded with laughter, that he offered to lick the whole training squadron. When this resulted in a spanking administered with the leg of a riding boot by

the lordly Woolcot, he tore out of the cadets' mess with fire in his eyes and wrath upon his brow.

"Lest he come back with a machine gun," said Renfrew, "I shall go and remonstrate with him."

Of course, Renfrew and the rest, having served overseas, with wound stripes here and there, and here and there a bit of ribbon to show that they'd done their bit, were not naturally quick to pal with the Babes in Arms; but this particular occasion, Renfrew felt, called for some demonstration of the fact that they were all in the same boat, so to speak, and he didn't feel that the flat of a riding boot was the best way to show it. That is what he endeavored to explain to young Worden when he found him in his tent cleaning out a service revolver which the government didn't mean him to possess.

"So you'd better pack that gun away where it won't be found when the Skipper decides to make inspection," said Renfrew. "And crawl forth and be friends."

Worden scowled up at him, dark eyes blazing.

"Renfrew," he said, "you've been overseas, and so has Woolcot, and a lot more of those hill-billies out yonder, but it's just clear as day you all ain't been to Kaintucky. Down there we don't reckon such actions as you been playin' at are in the lines of fun. We look on 'em as jus' plumb insultin', an' somebody's got to answer for it."

He stood up when he said that, and glared at Renfrew with eyes blazing blue fire, and the gun in his hand. He looked so young and so enthusiastic about

it that Renfrew had to frown like a sergeant major to suppress a grin.

"All right," said Renfrew, "I'll be the man. I'll answer for it right now I'll answer for myself and the other men as well. You played the fool, young Worden, and we treated you as if you were one of us —an overseas man, only younger. It was our mistake, and we're sorry for it. Is that all right?"

Worden stared at him a moment, and then almost laughed. He threw the gun petulantly upon his cot and tossed his head as though mosquitoes were troubling him.

"No! Damn it!" he blurted out. "No! It's not all right. You've just played the fool, that's all. It's me who ought to be sorry!"

Renfrew grinned, trying to show that he understood what the youngster meant; and then he nodded his head.

"I'm going over to the tarmac," he said, "and report for flying." The tarmac is that strip of roadway which surrounds the hangars where the planes are kept.

"I'll walk over with you," said Worden, impulsively. And then, warily, "If I may."

Renfrew told him that he might, and they sat together on a bench outside the hangar while Worden spoke of his home in Louisville, and how his English-born father and mother had refused to avail themselves of their chance to gain his release when he told them that he had run away to Canada and joined the flyers.

"So I guess I'll just have to come back, all right," he said.

CHAPTER II

BOB MAKES A BET

THEY learned to fly in Curtiss planes, J.N.4's. You know them—the type you see all over the country at the county fairs—the good old, fool-proof Jenny. They needed flyers badly at the front in those days, and although they had prepared at the University a ground school of theoretic flying with nice classes and lecture rooms and demonstrations of incalculable importance, Renfrew's group skipped that part of it and went out to the flying camps to learn to fly.

Thus, having learned nothing of how difficult or dangerous it was to fly, they just went up with an instructor in the pilot's seat and flew around and around the airdrome, taking off, landing, and taking off again. Then the instructor put his pupil in the pilot's seat and himself sat in front, to resume the round of taking off, landing and taking off again. Then, when the pupil had made a few take-offs and landings without his aid, he climbed out of his front seat and left that pupil in the middle of the airdrome to do it all alone.

Renfrew went up alone after one hour and forty minutes dual, and Bobby went up two days later after two hours and ten minutes dual.

Upshaw, who was his instructor, climbed out of the machine in which he'd been giving Bobby his dual instruction, just as Renfrew landed from his fourth solo flight. Renfrew taxied up to a position well out of the youngster's way and watched him receive his last instructions from Upshaw before realizing that the machine to which he gave the right of way was carrying young Worden on his solo flight.

When Renfrew did realize it, he felt that it was all wrong. He remembered fleetly the horror and torture which he himself had undergone on his first flight, and was indignant that this kid should have to endure such an experience without sufficient training, test, or trial. But there was nothing to be done about it. They were merely small pieces of an exceedingly large war, and moreover, even as Renfrew rebelled against Bobby's situation, the youngster opened his throttle and his plane lurched forward.

Bob's plane hopped forward in a series of lumbering bounces directly he opened the throttle. Then, as he tried too soon to bring its tail up, it swerved crazily out of the wind, dragging one wing upon the ground, like a wounded duck. He gave it extreme left rudder, still shoving forward on his elevators, and it swerved in a great, awkward curve to the left, while its tail arose and fell in funny jerks. Poor Bobby was unable to cope with the torque of the propeller which in a machine run by a high powered stationary engine pulls always to the right. But he was game. He kicked the rudder over again, gave her the gun once more,

and with gathering speed, he swerved magnificently in a series of zigzags toward the line of trees which hedged the drome. As he did so, the plane made a series of bouncing hops in response to his overeager attempts to get it off the ground. Finally, seeing that he could never make it, he turned the speeding plane in a wide circle which providence alone prevented from ending in a nose-down crash, and taxied back to his starting place. Upshaw ran to him, all agrin.

"What's the matter?" he yelled. "Drop a nickel?"

"No," drawled Bob from between white lips. "Jus' takin' the bucks out of her."

"Right-o," approved Upshaw. "When you start this time, start with a firm but slight pressure on the left rudder, and keep your nose down. Off you go."

Again Bobby made his engine roar, and again his plane strove to make that right-hand swerve, but this time Bobby had his foot on the rudder with that pressure which was to become second nature to him. The plane lurched and swerved this way and that, but did not get out of the wind. Bobby eagerly pulled back his stick with the result that his machine left the ground before it lifted its tail, and they who watched from the airdrome waited in sick silence for him to stall and plunge nose first into the ground; but, miraculously, he got over the trees, while the whole weight of his plane hung on the prop. Then he straightened out, dropped his nose a bit, and gained his flying speed.

Watching this crazy, suicidal flight, Renfrew saw Bob's machine fly round the south side of the drome

until it left his field of vision, so he shoved open his throttle and taxied up to the tarmac with a rush that nearly sent him through a group of seven officers and the hangar wall. He shut off his engine and leaped out to look for Bobby on the five hundred foot level, for that was the level at which he'd been accustomed to fly. But Bobby was not there.

"There he is!" yelled Upshaw. "He's climbing. Where's he think he's going to? Heaven?"

"Oh, come down, kid! Come down!" Captain Pride, the C.O., kept saying, and following the captain's gaze, Renfrew saw Bob Worden start to obey his plea.

Poor Bob had experienced the first disillusionment of flight, which is that the plane which seems always too ready to plunge earthward, is built to fly, and with its engine going, strives always for the upper air. Until now, Bob had flown with another man in the plane. Without that man, the machine had a mad ebullience, and in spite of Bob's every effort to keep its nose on the horizon, it surged upward in leaps and bounds. It was as hard to keep her nose level as it is to keep a canoe straight in a high wind.

So Bobby climbed. And when he turned at the east end of the drome, to bring her down into the wind, he allowed himself enough room for gliding as he would have needed for a landing from five hundred feet above the ground. But he had climbed. He was a good two thousand feet up, and at that level he needed more room than the length of two airdromes would have given him.

"Come down, kid! Come down!" moaned Captain Pride, and Bobby Worden, the particular thorn in the side of every disciplinarian in the British Army with whom he came in contact, obeyed that order just as if he had heard it. Cutting off his motor right there on the edge of the airdrome, he shoved down his stick, aimed straight at the ground and proceeded to land with the gliding angle of a pile driver.

Down he came with his wires shrieking in the wind; down, down, with his plane, designed to make sixty-five miles an hour and land at thirty-five, sliding down the air at a good ninety miles per hour. With blanched faces they watched him, and with blanched faces, they saw him "straighten out"—that's what you call it when a man comes out of his glide and makes that swift, skimming flight straight over the ground which precedes the gentle touch of landing.

Bobby straightened out. Traveling at ninety miles an hour, he pulled his stick back as he was accustomed to pull it back to make a landing at thirty-five miles an hour. The plane, feeling the mighty pressure of the air upon its suddenly tilted elevators, shot upward in a mad, wild plunge, and about thirty feet from the ground, hung quivering, with its spinning prop in the air, preparatory to a stall. Renfrew waited, shocked, to see it make the fatal nose dive, and the white ambulance stole softly forth from its lair between the hangars. But not for Bobby. Oh, no! Bobby, feeling even more keenly than the spectators that quiver-

ing hesitation of his plane, shoved his throttle all the way forward and put his nose down.

He plunged for the earth with engine full blast, shut off his engine and then straightened out again. He shot across that airdrome with his wheels four feet over the ground, brought her down to earth, bounced mightily to a spot far removed from where he had hit, bounced once more, gave her the gun, bounced again, even as he shut off his engine, and then, swerving out of the wind, hit the ground with his nose and ended his mad career with his tail straight in the air.

Twenty officers and men ran to greet him, and found him filled with glee.

"Fun! Fun!" he yelled, alive with laughter. "Ah'm goin' up again, right off!"

"You are," said Upshaw. "With me."

Renfrew was somewhat rankled by the youngster's reckless enthusiasm for a stunt which had caused every man on the ground more worry than the kid was worth. At least that's what Renfrew told him.

"It wasn't any flight to brag about," he said. "You certainly used up a lot of sky, and more airdrome than the government can afford to give to one man alone."

"That's all right," Bob chortled. "It was fun."

"But you know why we shoot down Germans, don't you?" Renfrew asked; and the youngster bit.

"Why?" he said.

"To prevent them smashing up our planes," said Renfrew.

Bob flushed.

"That's all right, Renfrew," said he, eyes blazing. "Ah'll bet you right now that Ah get my first man before you do."

At that the lightness went out of Renfrew's voice.

"Perhaps," said Renfrew coldly. "We're not in this war to run up scores, you know." But, seeing Bobby wince, he relented.

"Anyway, let's hope we're together when the time comes," he said.

"Sure," said Bobby warmly, as he crossed the airdrome to join the waiting Upshaw.

CHAPTER III

THE REAL THING

BOB WORDEN'S wish came true. When the time came, he and Renfrew were together. They finished training together, won their commissions together, and, with the eleven comrades who remained out of the twenty who started training with them, they crossed to England together. The nine who did not go had been weeded out by crashes from which they had gone to hospital, crashes from which they had been removed to flag-draped coffins, and crashes which had shattered the nerves of the flyer past mending.

Bobby came through because he seemed to be guarded by some protecting angel. He came through crashes more dire than several which had washed out some of those nine lost pilots; he came through lapses of discipline which would have drummed others out of the service. Careless young Worden, to whom absence without leave and wild skirmishes with death in unfamiliar demons of speeding aircraft were alike —fun!

And all this was in spite of Renfrew. The war bred strange friendships, and this friendship between the calm young veteran of many adventures and the reck-

less boy was one of them. Renfrew had learned contempt for such dare-deviltry as characterizes the man without a mind, and he despised the grand-stand play. Bob Worden seemed to glory in both these fatal weaknesses, yet Renfrew did not lose faith in him.

They were assigned to a training squadron to learn the tricks and mysteries of flying the D.H.5, that back-staggered little demon which was designed for trench strafing and had the gliding angle of a brick. Its pilots were known as "The Suicide Club," and it landed at a speed of ninety miles an hour.

Bob made his first flight in one of them after returning at two in the morning from a London leave, and tried to fly it under a bridge at Shrewsbury. He hit the water flat with the belly of his machine at a hundred and twenty miles an hour and was picked out of the wreckage by fifteen boatmen who had to hold his chin above water with a rope while they untangled him.

Renfrew had it out with him when he came back to the squadron in disgrace.

"You've done more damage to the Flying Corps than a flight of Germans!" he said. "Every machine we've got is precious, and you, individually, represent a pretty steep investment in the sinews of war. And you go risking your neck and washing out a plane just to thrill the noncombatants on the river bank."

"Ah was practicing stuntin'!" cried Bob hotly. "If you don't do any stuntin', how can a man expect to shoot down Huns? That's all we're here for, isn't it?"

"No. Lord, Bob, you talk like a yellow newspaper!

What we're here for is to fly. We're here to make reconnaissances, direct artillery fire, and drop bombs on military camps; that's what the Flying Corps is for. And if we're going to fly scouts, we're here to see that the observers and bombers have a clear field."

"Sure! Shoot down enemy planes! That's just what I said!"

"But you said it like a pothunter. Like a man who's out to make enough grand-stand plays at the expense of the wretched man who must fight him, to win a medal and get his name in the papers back home. We're not going to war for that, old boy!"

"Maybe not. But Ah'm tellin' you right now, Doug, that before this war's over, Ah'm goin' to be as big a man as any of them. There ain't goin' to be NOBODY with more medals and bigger records than what Ah've got!"

Whereupon Renfrew gave it up in disgust. He couldn't give up Bobby, for the youngster had crossed that line of friendship which separates your acquaintance from your chum. Bob Worden had become Renfrew's chum, and so long as the war left them above the ground, they would stick together; but there was a space as wide as the South Pole is from the North between the kind of man that Renfrew was and the kind of man that was contained in the reckless self-centered being of Bobby Worden.

They went to the front with Camels; a Camel was a little, humped machine built strictly for fighting. It had no comfort, and no margin of safety. It had the

flying agility of a bird with the difference that it could fly upside down and turn in the air like a corkscrew; and it was full of guile. It possessed tricks which could send the unwary flyer spinning or diving to his death. But it could fight. It mounted two machine guns which fired through the prop, and a Lewis gun which rested on the center wing section and could be brought down on a ratchet at the pilot's need. There is no stunt a Camel could not do.

Bobby went to war with his Camel as a child goes forth to try a new toy, and Renfrew was worried about him. Worden was overeager to bring down his man, and the unceasing conflict between Renfrew's attitude which, like that of most veterans, regarded the enemy not as a hunter's prey, but as a game opponent fighting for a cause which he believed was good, and Worden's attitude, which regarded German flyers in much the same light as a huntsman regards a wild duck, had made Bobby intensely determined to bring down an enemy before Renfrew did. Renfrew's warning that he would find the wild duck a deadly air fighter, merely gave an edge to Bob's appetite. But in France, Renfrew found an ally in Major Reece, Officer Commanding Squadron Fifty-four, to which the two of them were posted. Reece, having seen large numbers of his recruits shot down before they had learned enough of combat to be useful, had no use for tufthunters.

"You're not here to bag game!" was his address of welcome to the newcomers. "You're here to do the most effective work you can! That means you will

have to take things easy for a while. Fool kids come over here in droves to shoot German planes as if they were clay pigeons, with their eyes on the score board. Get that out of your heads, or you'll last just about five days—that's the average life of a pothunter. If you'll just hang about in the background for a week or two and learn how the seasoned men do it, you'll live as long as they do; and it's the man who lives long enough to be useful who wins the war. The first fool that flies into a fight with all guns blazing and no knowledge of fighting goes back to pilot's pool! Do you understand?"

But that evening Bobby made it plain to Renfrew that he had understood the major with reservations. He had scraped through too many disciplinary holes to fear very much the C.O.'s wrath, and anyway, the warning didn't apply to him. He knew just how he was going about this matter of fighting in the air, and he wasn't afraid of any German aviator born. Renfrew, who had long since ceased to argue the point, shrugged his shoulders with a resignation that didn't allay the anxiety he felt. For he knew what death was, did Renfrew, and he knew how ardently his youthful chum was courting it.

"Have your way," he said. "Only remember what Reece has said. He and all the other fellows who wear the medals, are not the fellows who tried for them. The fellows who have only the medals in mind die young. You're up against the real thing, now!"

CHAPTER IV

THE TEST OF THE FIRST BATTLE

FIFTY-FOUR Squadron went up, two days later, on patrol. Defensive patrol, it was, which meant that they were to keep all enemy planes from crossing our lines. As Renfrew walked toward the waiting planes over the soft green park of the château outside La Bassée where Fifty-four had its airdrome, he would have given all he owned for some word to say to Bob, who walked beside him, which would have pledged the youngster to heed Reece's warning. But, as they separated to climb into their planes, all he could say was, "Well, take care of yourself, Bob." And Bob replied. "Let Fritz do that. I'm out to get my man, Doug."

Renfrew frowned wearily, as he tuned up his motor.

They were droning over Passchendaele about half an hour later, in a flight of six machines, when Reece sighted the circus. The Germans at that time had a way of flying in swarms of twenty or thirty scouts together, and they painted their machines with bright colors, stunting and circling in the sunlight, so we called them flying circuses, and made the most of them.

The circus which now swept down on Reece's flight, obviously intent upon breaking through and crossing

the British lines, numbered some thirty planes; Reece had six. In as much as the Germans appeared to be intent on crossing the lines, it looked as though Renfrew and Bob were about to learn something about air fighting.

"Whatever happens, you newcomers will keep close to my tail," Reece had ordered them. And so far Bob had obeyed him.

While the circus approached, Reece kept his flight weaving up and down in solemn formation, making pretty maneuvers to keep positions at the sharp turns he made. The German machines were about a thousand yards away when Reece fired his Very pistol and gave them, "Every man for himself."

"Good!" muttered Renfrew to himself, as he saw the white light shoot forth. "A dog fight!"

He looked down quickly at the green and yellow ground, seven thousand feet below, then he looked to his right for Bob Worden. The youngster had swerved, bringing his nose about to aim straight at the enemy ranks. That meant thirty guns in his face from as many different angles, so Renfrew let his throttle out to its utmost, tilted his nose to gain speed, zoomed upward, and cut across Worden's bow. Bob had to turn with Renfrew, or hit him, and, as he turned, Renfrew led him into an upward curve. As they swept up in that fine curve, the circus opened fire. The rattle of their machine guns rang in the ears of the flyers above the engines' roar, and they felt the bullets in the fabric of their planes.

Renfrew had done the right thing. He had done his part in breaking up the circus and scattering it over a wide area, and as the German scouts roared by, he half rolled and doubled back. Trying to engage the six Camels, the Germans broke into a flashing kaleidoscope of many brilliant colors.

In a moment the whole air seemed full of Fokkers. None of the Camels had fired much as yet, but it seemed as if they could hardly explode a cartridge without hitting one of those bright planes—nor could the Germans. As the action commenced, two, three Spads and a lone Bristol Fighter came speeding up for the dog fight from the distant skies.

Heeding Reece's order, Renfrew circled upward, to seek the commander, but as he did so he saw Bob Worden plunge, with wires shrieking, into the thick of the fray, and like a hawk Renfrew followed him. There was no time now for studying the game. Bob Worden was biting off more than he could chew, and he had need of a friend.

But Renfrew soon found it impossible to keep an eye on the impulsive Bobby. He had no more than followed the reckless youngster's lead before he had a yellow Fokker with blazing crosses on its wings close upon his tail. Renfrew circled sharply, and the yellow plane whizzed across his path at some seventy yards from his nose. Renfrew almost pulled his elevators off in twisting to follow him.

The German looped as he saw Renfrew on his tail, and Renfrew made a vertical twist to meet him when

he came out of it. The German was under him when he finished his loop, and Renfrew swung around in a curving dive to gain a position just under his enemy's elevators. It was fast, fast, you know. All of them moving at more than a hundred miles an hour.

Renfrew dipped to bring his guns to bear. He fired, but the German swerved, and tried to climb above him, flashing sideways. The Camel looped, and rolled at the top of its loop, but the yellow man had stalled, and dropped like a stone from Renfrew's vision. Trying to follow his enemy with his eyes, Renfrew nearly ran into a brilliant scarlet fellow who was coming at him head on. That scarlet Fokker could have had him then for the price of a quick pressure on his trigger, but he must have been startled by the near collision, and he zoomed out of Renfrew's way. Renfrew half rolled to get behind him, and, as he did so, he saw one of his own machines hard pressed.

It was Bob Worden, flying with blithe disregard for the presence in the air of any other plane but the red striped Fokker which he had picked out for his own. He had tried for one machine after another in the mad seconds which had passed, but all had eluded him, while, although he didn't know it, he owed his life to no other circumstance than that not one of the seven German flyers who had drawn a bead on him had been able to fire without hitting one of their own men, beyond.

When the particular German aviator who piloted that red striped machine decided to lead this British

novice out into the open for fair slaughter, Bobby followed him gleefully. The maneuver was quickly seen and quickly followed by the pilot of a green and black Fokker, who had often played this game before with the pilot of the red stripe as his accomplice, and poor Bobby, within an ace, he believed, of getting his bead upon the red striped fox, heard the awful RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT! of a machine gun at his back, and found himself out in the open sky with enemies before and behind him.

He zoomed wildly, and whipped his little Camel about, but it was only necessary for green and black to make a vertical spiral to cut him off, while red stripe half rolled and took up his position on Bobby's tail. It looked then as though Reece's warning had come true, and that Bobby had flown to his death. But just as Bob was about to make the fatal but unavoidable spin, which would turn him back toward Germany, a single Camel detached itself from the dog fight which filled the air to the westward, and Renfrew came roaring down upon the green and black Fokker which cut Bob off from his mates, and sent the German swerving in a mad spiral to take issue with him. Bobby bounded into the air, and raced back to the comfortable security of the dog fight.

Once he had attained the reassuring company of that sky full of circling, twisting, stunting and occasionally death-dealing machines, Bob Worden felt a sense of shame surge through him, that he should have left Renfrew to fight it out alone; so he swung about and

looked backward to the east. He was in time to see Renfrew come out of a circling dance to dive upon the green and black Fokker, just as the red striped machine gave up a like dance directly over Renfrew's head, and dived on the Camel's tail. Bob saw Renfrew pounce upon his man, and he heard the rattle of the red man's gun as he pounced upon Renfrew. Bob was in the act of flying forth to help when he saw the Camel's pounce give way to a sudden upward swoop; saw the machine swerve crazily for a moment, and then plunge forward into the fatal dive.

At that moment a burst of machine gun fire rattling through his fabric called Worden's attention to the fact that he was attacked from behind, and he looped, to see the entire circus sweep beneath him, gathering for flight back to Germany.

Frantic with shame and grief and anger, Bob would have given chase to the whole squadron of them, but he soon saw that two other Camels and a Spad which had also given chase were beating back toward him against the wind, and looking at his petrol gauge and then at the green and yellow ground so far below him, he discovered that he was well over the lines and that he had scarcely enough petrol to get back with. So he joined the Camels and sped home.

CHAPTER V

BOB LOSES HIS BET

THEY landed in the airdrome, three together, and as Bobby's plane came to a halt, he fell back in his seat. He didn't feel that he could go on living now that his idiocy, his grand-stand playing, had led Renfrew to his death.

Sadly, feeling intensely sick, he climbed from his plane at the tarmac and walked over to Reece, who stood talking over the flight with his officers.

"Guess they got poor old Hurley," Reece was saying "Though Somers says he made a landing inside their lines. Hope so. Lord; what's the matter, kid? Wounded?" He stared piercingly at Bob's pale face.

"No sir. But Renfrew—Ah played the fool—jus' like you said—an' poor ole Renfrew—they killed him! He flew in to save my skin . . . An' it wasn't worth it! It wasn't! . . . Ah've done killed him, now!"

He became conscious that the major was staring at him in amazement mingled with amusement.

"Killed him?" he cried. And he laughed. "Not unless that's his ghost over at the orderly room!"

Bobby stared transfixed.

"The orderly room!" he gasped. And then he looked

down the tarmac and, sure enough, there was Renfrew's battle-scarred Camel with the rest of them.

"Surely," smiled Reece. "He's reporting his first enemy plane. Didn't you see him? He got a direct hit out of that tawny orange fellow by making the nastiest vertical dive I've ever seen a man fool enough to make with a Camel and live. Thought he was out of control, till he fired."

Bob rushed off to the orderly room without waiting to hear more, and there was Renfrew, large as life, filling in his log book. He greeted Bobby heartily enough without a word for Bob's shameful conduct during the fight, and Bobby, suddenly virtuous, warned him against making vertical dives with a Camel. It was then the youngster discovered that Reece had guessed right. When Renfrew made that dive, his machine had been out of control.

You remember a Camel mounted three machine guns. Two of them were fixed Vickers guns, firing through the prop. The other was a Lewis gun which was mounted on the upper wing and could be pulled down on a ratchet so that the pilot could fire, free hand, across his upper field of vision. This made it possible to use the Camel in two ways, you could aim your guns by steering directly at your target, or you could sit under him and fire up. The more expert fighters liked this last attack because it made you invisible to your opponent once you got under his tail, and it made it extraordinarily hard for him to get away from you.

When Renfrew found himself above the green and

black Fokker he decided to use this method of attack, so he reached up one hand and made sure the ratchet of his Lewis gun was loose enough for him to use it quickly, then he dived on the enemy with bow guns blazing, went right past the Fokker's tail, to the complete surprise of the German pilot, and pulled up his stick to get under the enemy's seat. But he pulled it up too abruptly. His machine bucked, as only a Camel can, and the Lewis gun came down on its ratchet to hit Renfrew with a tremendous crack on the crown of his head.

The stock of that Lewis gun knocked him completely out, and his machine, with Renfrew dazed, went into a vertical dive, out of all control. When he came to his senses in another second, Renfrew found himself plunging earthward at about one hundred and eighty miles an hour, and when he gingerly drew back his stick to see if he could pull himself out of that dive without snapping his wings off, he brought himself into an exact line with a Fokker of tawny orange hue which had just spun out of the fight. All he had to do was yank up his pressure handle, press his Bowden control and see that particular enemy go hurtling down until its wings collapsed and it dropped to earth like a stone.

CHAPTER VI

A CHALLENGE FROM THE AIR

IN the months that followed, Bob Worden learned saner methods of flying and of fighting, though he never lost his delight in daring. He learned, too, the truth of what war means, which was tragedy. He saw many good comrades die, shot down in aërial combat, or brought down flaming like meteors to the distant earth. But he himself always escaped; he was preserved to learn a shrewd way of dealing with death in the air and to achieve something of a reputation as a fighting airman.

Renfrew, meanwhile, achieved the same end in his own way. His experience with the Mounted Police before the war had made him wise in the ways of conflict. He recognized at once that air fighting was a highly scientific form of combat, and he played warily in the offing until he had grasped the innumerable lessons of the game.

In the movements and processes of war he lost touch with Bob Worden and the six who remained of the eleven who had crossed the seas together; but in all the fortuitous comradeships of war he did not forget them. Coolly, doggedly he followed the pathway which seemed to lead to certain death, and with that

resignation which made it possible for a man to live through the nightmare of the conflict, he heard through various channels of the various dooms which overtook those six original companions. But he was to wait a long time before Bob Worden's name came to his ears again.

As he attained greater proficiency in his deadly work, Renfrew became known as a good man to fly with; a reliable protection in convoy, and a deadly contender in a dog fight. Calmly and resolutely he learned the dangerous game of fighting in the air, until the official count of his victories had credited him with eleven enemy planes. His name became known up and down the line, his skill and daring became matters of conversation in the trenches, and, finally, as the fortunes of war and the value of his coolness won him promotion and the command of a flight, it became apparent that the German airmen knew his name as well. It appeared in the form of a certain tribute—a tribute of respect, which took the form of an increasing reluctance on the part of the German rank and file of flying men to engage him in combat. From time to time Renfrew was moved up and down the front as he was attached to different squadrons, and his movements seemed always to be marked by the German flyers, who became coy in their meetings with him until they were reënforced by leaders with reputations as deadly as Renfrew's had become. Foremost among these was Bracher, and Renfrew met Bracher while he was commanding B Flight of Squadron Forty-nine.

Squadron Forty-nine was stationed at Cassel, behind the salient. The great war, which had been a deadly game of armies striving for barren gains, backward and forward across a devastated field—a game which had been protracted for four years by an unceasing series of tragic mistakes and stupid ambitions —had resolved itself into a deadlock, with both sides playing for time to recuperate a strength which was long since spent.

In a little while the Teutonic Allies were to gain new life from the stream of men which Russia, collapsing, would free for the Kaiser's service. Then they would push forward in a vast and irresistible wave against the western front, and so overwhelm the war-weary, exhausted line of French and British troops as to make this lovely garden where Renfrew's squadron had its airdrome no longer tenable for the British. That far the Kaiser's hordes were to advance until the rumors of countless thousands of fresh fighting men from the United States were to become an accomplished fact with the appearance of the American uniform all up and down the line. A fresh stream, flowing into stagnant waters, which was to give Foch the power to follow through the mighty offensive which he planned, and bring the five years of slaughter to an end.

But this much was not known to Captain Renfrew in those days. All Renfrew knew, as all his fellow officers knew, and all the millions of fighting men up and down the line, was that the line must hold. Not so

much as a yard or a rod must the Germans gain. Not so much as a down was to be permitted the Allied cause, if Calais was to be held, and the Channel be kept open. In the trenches a million men were holding hard, and in the air Renfrew and his comrades must see that every bomber was turned back, every observer held in check, and every enemy fighting plane swept from the skies above the line.

Those were active days, and the men in the trenches were to see whole squadrons of S.E.'s sweep roaring across the lines to clear the air for our bombers and reconnaissance patrols. From the ground were witnessed conflicts overhead which filled the sky with fires of men dying, and brought a rain of wasted bullets to the ground. German planes and British, Australian and Canadian, fell like flies to the earth, and the rattle of the machine guns held a spiteful chorus up among the clouds. And then a pause ensued—a pause, while the Germans gathered strength for the last great push—and for days the skies were clear of all but droning patrols which skipped about amidst the antiaircraft fire which the German defense guns sent vainly up to scatter them.

On a bright winter day Renfrew had taken out his flight on such a patrol immediately after the luncheon hour. They made their journey a holiday, as the Flying Corps was wont to do, and played at fighting each other until their game brought them, looping and spiraling and cavorting, low over the British lines, then they swooped down, hopped over the trenches,

rolled their wheels upon the ground behind, zoomed up in that sky-seeking plunge which only an S.E.5 can achieve, and happily came home to tea.

The cold, clear blue of the winter sky was unmarred by the passage of bird, cloud or man when they went into the mess for their tea; but while they chatted and joked about their cozy fireplace, a small silver plane with black crosses on its wing tips droned across the lines, and came sweeping down above the mess. Hearing it, the officers of Squadron Forty-nine ran out from their dining room to greet what they thought might be a visitor; and a hundred odd mechanics craned their necks from the tarmac, amazed at the colossal impudence of this glittering enemy.

"It's a Pfaltz!" yelled Graham, the adjutant. "He must be drunk or crazy!"

"Is he going to land?" cried Blanding, as the lovely, glittering thing turned on its side and dipped in a slipping spiral to circle the hangars.

"My Lord!" snapped Major Rand, the O.C. "He's going to chase us! Run out some machines!" This to the orderly sergeant who hovered near him as the shining body of the German plane turned into the airdrome and swooped at them with a roar.

The Pfaltz was obviously not going to land, for it came at them full speed, but it came astonishingly close to the ground—so close, indeed, that Renfrew saw the pilot's face.

"Stay me with flagons!" he cried. "It's Bracher!" And his fellows stared at him in astonishment, for

Bracher was the champion of German airmen. His face, with its wide, good-humored mouth, and its odd expression of impudence which it derived from the curl of those full lips beneath a bluntly stubbed nose, had been printed in all the illustrated papers of Europe and America.

"Good!" snapped Rand. "We've got him! Get some machine guns on him!"

But they hadn't started for the hangars before the glittering visitor which Renfrew followed with fascination, admiration and amusement, swooped so close to them that they instinctively retreated, and the pilot dropped from one hand which hung loosely out of his cockpit something white. Renfrew saw him grin as he did it, and heard young Blanding remark with a sigh upon the perfection of the German's climbing turn, as Bracher zoomed with a roar above the hangars.

With a perfect understanding that the white message was meant for him, Renfrew stepped forward and picked it up. The message was written neatly upon rough paper which had been wrapped about a machine gun cartridge. Renfrew's fellows gathered about him while he read it.

> Come up and fight, Renfrew [read the message]. I shall be up between the lines above Ypres alone to-morrow morning at eleven-thirty. 12,000 ft.
>
> HERMAN BRACHER

CHAPTER VII

A BATTLE OF EAGLES

"O-O-O-O-H," murmured Blanding. "What a sportsman!"

It was a perfect tribute. Blanding, who had flown over the lines for a year and five months, knew vividly what the German champion had risked to bring this challenge to Renfrew. He had risked nothing less than death. And in its way, Bracher's action was also a tribute to the sportsmanship of his British opponents. Alone over the lines at eleven-thirty in the morning. What a chance for the Flying Corps to trap this deadly antagonist! What a chance to overpower him with numbers!

"You lucky dog!" grinned Rand, as Renfrew thrust the message in his pocket.

"If you can call it luck," grinned Blanding. He had known what it was to spin twice from the death-dealing fire of Bracher's guns, and his grin, like Rand's, was tight lipped because of that knowledge. "Better oil your gears, skipper."

Renfrew looked at him and grinned. He was thinking that to fight in the air was a fine, clean way of fighting. He was thinking that it gave shame to a man that with such an adversary as this he must fight a duel to the death.

At eleven-fifteen the next morning, Renfrew saw his machine wheeled out on to the tarmac. He had spent the morning tuning up his engine, tightening his rigging, adjusting the gears which synchronized his machine guns with his propeller, cleaning and oiling his guns, and adjusting the deflection sights. Upon these delicate contrivances his life was to hang that morning; upon these delicate contrivances, and upon his quickness of eye and hand.

Blanding and Openshaw, realizing this, had hung about at his elbow since dawn, giving him what help they could. It was notable that the two youngsters were nervous. Highly excited they were, at the thought of this conflict which was to bring Bracher and Renfrew together with the presence of no other machine to distract either of them from concentration of nerve and skill upon overcoming the nerve and skill of his opponent.

Renfrew seemed undisturbed. He went about his preparations as though for a flight to London. Only his intense preoccupation betrayed what thoughts must have occupied his mind. A man does not live in the presence of death day by day, as men lived during the war, to feel fear for such a meeting as Renfrew had undertaken. But since he had seen that bright silver plane dart down so low over the enemy's lair, Renfrew had felt that it would be a sad thing to die at Bracher's hands, and sad, too, to put death aside by bringing Bracher down.

At eleven-sixteen Renfrew had his engine ticking

over, and at eleven-twenty he set the long nose of his Scout dead into the wind, and opening up his engine, zoomed into the clear, cold sky. Squadron Forty-nine stood on the grass and watched him become a speck in the blue, then vanish; whereupon Squadron Forty-nine, with grave faces, turned to the hangars and did fatigue duty with its machine guns.

That morning the men in the trenches saw a lonely plane which flashed like a silver bird against the blue, come droning over the salient at a great height, and they gazed up, watching it with wonder, as it circled daintily above them. It seemed to be waiting for something. Six minutes passed, and the fighting men growled their bewilderment as the German scout still circled, and the empty sky seemed to provide no motive for its presence Then a droning came from the west, and the puzzled men brightened. For out of the west was speeding a single, wasp-like plane, marked with the red, white and blue target of the Flying Corps. In an ecstasy of delight that this combat should be staged for their enjoyment, the countless keepers of the salient threw themselves upon their backs and settled down to enjoy the show.

Renfrew came to his rendezvous with high speed, because, at twelve thousand feet, the west wind was blowing great guns. Renfrew's S.E.5 was making a ground speed of more than one hundred and thirty miles an hour. Bracher, allowing for this wind pressure, was flying wide circles, or rather ellipses, speeding eastward, to turn and beat up more slowly into the

west. When Renfrew appeared he was some three hundred feet above his enemy, and, as he neared Bracher's position, he zoomed, gaining four hundred feet more in a single upward swoop.

Bracher, having continued his circling until satisfied of Renfrew's purpose, turned east in the wind with lightning suddenness, and sped away from his opponent in a series of twists, rolls, and zigzag turns which were designed to baffle Renfrew's aim. This achieved its purpose. Renfrew came diving down, striving to catch Bracher in his sights, and firing short bursts with his machine gun. When he had reached an altitude fifty feet above Bracher's level, Bracher swooped upward until he was on his back; he then half rolled out of his loop and came head on at Renfrew, who had throttled down, to keep his position.

That was the maneuver which should have decided the battle. Both men were deadly shots, and both of them asked nothing more from the fortunes of war than that they might have their enemy directly in front of their guns; but in this case, as Bracher's heroic move achieved for both of them their best position, a queer thing came to pass.

The two planes were speeding directly at one another at an average speed of one hundred and ten miles an hour. In such a case, you do one of two things. You crash head on and meet death in that most horrible of accidents—a collision in the air—or you get your opponent out of your way. The best way to do this is to fire quickly and accurately, being sure to hit

your man—and then zoom. In short, this particular maneuver is as close to suicide as a sane man can come unless he is sure of hitting his opponent with his first burst of fire. Both Renfrew and Bracher used it, because they were reasonably sure; but in this case, neither of them fired. In the shattered second when they should have fired, they both gave way to an impulse which set each of them bearing off in a mad, heeling circle to his right; and each of them knew that the other had refrained from firing at the certain risk of his own life.

Then, as though ashamed of his magnanimity, Bracher, who had continued his vertical turn into a complete double spiral, came out of it on the tail of Renfrew, who had curved back to the left to find him. Now Renfrew had the wind behind him, and Bracher between him and the lines. His powerful engine and the thirty-mile gale were sweeping him fast toward Germany, and the wind had helped Bracher lead the fight that way since the beginning.

Renfrew zoomed to loop, and Bracher, with extraordinary skill, brought up the nose of his machine, fired by feel rather than deflection, and raked Renfrew's bus from stem to stern while he swept about upside down. Renfrew saw his propeller fly to pieces even while he hung above the earth, and he came out of the loop, blazing away with both guns, while he used rudder and elevator to get his man.

That was all he could do. There was only one course for Renfrew now, and that was downward, but

before he began the downward glide, he sought to make sure Bracher would not follow him by that desperate burst of fire in the loop. He fired with an aim which was stimulated by his predicament. He lightly plied his stick, pressed his rudder, twitched his machine from the full course of its inverted dive, and, thus catching Bracher's plane in his sight, let go. He caught a fleeting glimpse of the line his tracer bullets made to Bracher's machine which was not more than seventy feet away from him, and then, surrendering to the force of gravity, dived steeply toward the earth.

He came quickly out of his dive, however, as he saw his opponent go into a spin, and felt an overwhelming sense of pity for the gallant fellow, as the lovely bird-like thing passed from his sight in that terrible, writhing fall. After that, Renfrew's attention was given to his landing, for an S.E.5 with a splintered prop permits of no distraction.

Below him he saw a confusion of small fields, cut unevenly into little triangles, squares, and rambling strips. Further east, in the direction which the great wind was blowing, a river glistened like a silver highway. He knew it would be impossible to glide back behind the British lines, for the devastated area of the salient was not in sight; anyway, it seemed all too doubtful if he could even land in the country of the German occupation without a disastrous crash, because that crazy quilt of little fields below was spread over a rolling, uneven ground, barred with hedges and spotted with woodlands.

"Looks like the inside of a German prison camp for the rest of the war," he told himself regretfully. "Lord, but we're dropping . . . and I've got to get back into the wind to land."

With his engine silent, and his prop a splintered stump, he could hear the wind whistle in his wires, and could see the ground leaping upward toward him, for he was gliding down wind, and an S.E.5 is heavy. It pancaked down as it rushed forward in its glide, and Renfrew could feel it settling under him; but he could not turn, for it seemed that his only chance lay in getting into a strip of open field which was hugged by a curve of the river, and that was well to the east ahead of him.

"If I can make that river in time to turn over it into the wind," he mused, "the prisoner will at least be a live one."

And then, while the fields sped up and passed him, he saw a thing which appeared to be a great silver bird skimming beneath him with its belly flat upon the ground. It was Bracher, and Renfrew swiftly diagnosed his late opponent's dilemma. The young German flyer was wounded; for that reason he had gone into a spin. He had regained control of himself in time to come out of his spin and now was trying to land before his wounds overcame him.

With every thought of warfare gone from his mind, and with the thought of his own safe landing gone as well, Renfrew testified to the admiration and respect which the German had won from him by trying now to

land as close to Bracher as he might. If the silver flyer was badly wounded he would need first aid. So Renfrew divided his attention between an effort to nurse his machine to a safe landing place, and an effort to keep the silver form below him well in sight. He was relieved when he saw that the wounded German was making for the same field on the river bank as he himself had chosen.

It needed fine nursing to make it, for a plane gliding down wind travels swiftly, and it lacks the wind resistance which keeps it in the air. Renfrew and Bracher traveled with little control, and to hold up their noses was to invite disaster. Renfrew saw Bracher, ahead of him and below him. The German seemed extremely close to the earth as his silver plane shot across the river, and as he turned to come back into the wind for his landing, Renfrew experienced a pang of anxiety, lest the gallant fellow hold his nose too high and dive into the water. But he saw him make the turn successfully at the same time as a glimpse of tree tops, roofs and hedges directly under his wings, warned him that he himself had little height to spare for that dangerous landing.

He let the wind help him, by turning on his side as he reached the river bank, and skidding in the air. The wind blew him in a wide arc, and he brought his nose around in the tick of a second which might have timed his ruin, for he was in fine position for a spin. He brought his nose into the wind with the meadow of the shore twenty rods ahead of him, and he at less

than a hundred feet. He had no engine to help him; only his flyer's skill, and he exerted this to his utmost. But all his careful flying could not bring him into the meadow. He had to realize in the end that he could never get over the wall which hedged it from the river bank, so he sideslipped down upon the green strip which lay between the wall and the water. He touched his wheels on the sod with a deft flip of the rudder which brought him out of his drift, and rolling quietly up to the wall banged the hood of his radiator against it with a resonant thud.

"Good thing the prop was busted," he reflected with a sigh. "I hate to break props in bad landings." But his sigh was of relief, for he knew the chances he had taken.

CHAPTER VIII

PLAYING THE GAME

HAVING climbed out of his bus, Renfrew scrambled immediately over the wall, and made for the silver plane in the field beyond. He saw Bracher standing beside it, evidently supporting himself with a hand upon the coping of his cockpit. The silver machine growled with the sound of its engine just ticking over. Renfrew ran across the field and around the tail of the silver Pfaltz, to greet its pilot, but Bracher's welcome was not a friendly one.

"You are my prisoner, Captain Renfrew," he announced. And in his free right hand he held an automatic pistol which was leveled at Renfrew's heart.

At that Renfrew lost his temper. He had risked a smash to come to this man's aid, and his greeting was given him with an automatic.

"Put down that gun!" he cried sharply. "You're not a policeman, you're a flyer!"

Bracher had removed his helmet and revealed a shock of ruffled yellow hair. His face was vividly white, and the wide eyes which had twinkled so humorously over the cowling when he had delivered his message at the airdrome, were now narrowed to slits. His wide, generous mouth was drawn very tightly, and the

lips of it were gray. He was obviously waging a desperate battle against faintness; and when he spoke in English a little stilted but not broken, his voice was slightly off key, strident and overwrought.

"No," he said, achieving the ghost of a smile. "Not a policeman. But I, Renfrew, I would not stay in the enemy lines any longer than God made me; and here is a—what you call—airplane with its propeller moving. But you are my prisoner, and you will stay here until some one comes to take you in care."

He glanced warily about, expecting the appearance of those curious ones who arise magically from the earth whenever an airplane lands, though it be in the middle of a desert. But no human being appeared. It was as though these two strange champions had landed upon a planet all to themselves. Renfrew examined his opponent narrowly.

"If I want to take your plane and go," he said. "I will. You are wounded."

Bracher's lips twisted in his attempt at a grin.

"In the leg," he said. "My hand is not wounded." He moved the automatic pistol in his hand, as an indication of his power.

"But we have done all our gunning up there," smiled Renfrew. "You cannot fire on me down here, you know you can't."

Bracher stared at him for a moment after that, with his eyes suddenly open to indicate the wonder which he felt.

"Why," he whispered at last. "That is right. We

are not cannon fodder, you and I; we are birds who fight in the air. Hein?"

He suddenly dropped the gun, so that it fell on the grass.

"That was a small thing for me to do," he said impulsively. "You must forgive me, Renfrew. I was wounded." And he stepped forward, as though to offer Renfrew the hand which had held the pistol; but he had not completed that first step before his wounded leg gave way beneath him and he fell to one knee. Renfrew sprang forward, and upheld him.

"That's better!" he cried. "We will forget—" But Bracher had slumped heavily in his arms, and Renfrew knew that his enemy had fainted.

He looked quickly about, but still there was no sign that their landing had been seen. Then he turned to his invalid, and on that riverside meadow, with the little German plane, purring, above them, he gave first aid to Bracher's wounded leg. It was a matter of bullets through the flesh of the lower leg, and there was much blood. All Renfrew could do was stanch the flow of it, and this he did as best he could. He was intent upon binding tightly the bandage which he had made from his own shirt sleeves, when a high-pitched voice rang out close to his ear.

"Look!" cried Bracher, who, half reclining upon the trailing edge of his plane's wing, was peering, fully conscious, across Renfrew's bent shoulder. "That boat! Look quick!"

And Renfrew turned to see a little rowboat ap-

proaching the meadow from the opposite shore of the river.

"That is a Dutch gendarme, who is in that boat. Two of them," said Bracher. "Renfrew, mein friend, we are in Holland!"

But Renfrew, too, had realized it by now. You see, they had rightly thought that the river marked the boundary, but here and there a twist in the stream gave the western bank neutral ground, and upon a patch of this neutral ground they had landed. The oncoming gendarmes would politely place both of them under arrest and they would be interned for the duration of the war.

"So we live in Holland for duration, Herr Kapitan Bracher," smiled Renfrew ruefully.

But Bracher was struggling to arise to his feet, and Renfrew, seeing that the gallant fellow would not be refused, assisted him, while he winced at the thought of how this action would undo the careful aid which he had given. Bracher, using the struts of his plane as crutches, drew himself erect.

"Not you!" he cried, then, and he tossed back his head in the old impudent, humorous gesture. "Until this wound is healed, I stay in Holland. But not you, mein Renfrew. For when I am healed, I shall get back. And then who will there be for me to fight, if Kapitan Renfrew is not there? No, Renfrew. You must take my little silver plane and go!"

"But you! That wounded leg!" cried Renfrew.

"They will give it greater good than you give it as

you keep me standing here. Get into that machine and fly! Quickly! They land!"

And they were landing. The little boat was even now picking its way to the brink of the meadow. Renfrew turned and saw that much, but when he turned back to Bracher he saw the German flyer swaying where he stood.

"You're faint!" he cried.

"It is good!" whispered Bracher, holding out one hand. Renfrew grasped the hand and shook it warmly. "If I am faint," said Bracher, "I cannot be reproached for letting you get away." And he stumbled down the length of the wing, making a great effort against darkness.

"Now go!" he cried, in a voice of singular strength and clearness.

Renfrew looked at him for a moment, then saw the heads of the gendarmes appear over the wall. With a bound he was in the cockpit and, as he gave the plane a blast of the engine to turn it into the wind, he saw Bracher stumble off the end of the wing.

"Good-by!" cried Renfrew. "Good luck!"

"Cheerio!" gasped Bracher, standing very rigidly upon one leg. And then, as the engine thundered, and the silver plane went sweeping down the field, "We will meet . . ." he cried, and fell to his knees while he clutched at the collar of his flying coat, "again!" and he was down, full length upon the grass.

Above him, in a silver plane, Renfrew circled once, and saw the gendarmes bending over the still body.

He circled again, and saw Bracher rise, stand up, push the gendarmes away, and lift his head to gaze at the bright bird above him. Renfrew saw Bracher wave an arm toward the west, bidding him fly quickly home, and in the fleeting glimpse he had of the upraised white face, Renfrew could have sworn he saw the gallant enemy smile.

CHAPTER IX

PAJAMA PATROL

THERE was a particular duty discharged by the R.F.C. which was known to the pilots of Squadron Forty-nine as Pajama Patrol. Wing Headquarters called it "early morning flying," but a man does not greet the duty of ascending twelve thousand feet into the air at four-thirty A.M. to do mortal combat before breakfast with that enthusiasm which inspires people with early morning engagements to get up thirty minutes ahead of time and dress for the occasion.

In Squadron Forty-nine you arranged with your batman to wake you up at four-twenty with one hand and serve you a cup of coffee with the other. You then doused your head in cold water and put on a pair of flying boots and a flying coat over your pajamas; by that time your machine was rolled out on the tarmac, and you walked across the dim airdrome to look it over before you jumped in and took to the land upstairs. This was the Pajama Patrol of Squadron Forty-nine.

We now turn to Brigadier General Tavistock. Brigadier General Tavistock had not always been a brigadier general. He had once been the general pro-

duction manager for Complice, Inc., which was the registered trade-mark of a firm which manufactured chocolates; but, chocolates waning in importance as a world war gripped the British Empire, general production manager Tavistock had gone into the Army. He had been a great success before the war as a colonel of the Territorials, which are England's equivalent of the American National Guard. He had always seen that his officers and men were properly dressed and that they were well and regularly fed during all field days and encampments. So the War Office made him a colonel in charge of transport, and let him loose in France. In France he became so singularly successful in the matter of seeing that all officers and men under his command appeared at all times completely dressed in the uniform according to army regulations, that he became famous as the greatest nuisance in his sector. So they gave him a brigadier's commission and attached him to the Flying Corps, where, knowing nothing of flying, they considered that he could do very little harm.

Captain Renfrew, commanding Squadron Forty-nine in the absence of its major, first became aware of this attachment, when Brigadier General Tavistock, having assumed command of the Flying Corps personnel in Renfrew's Corps area, visited the squadron for an inspection. He was a vigorous man, was the general, and had spent his time in the transport service champing at the bit, so to speak, for an opportunity to get up to the front. Give him a chance for service, he

had said, and he'd show them what was meant by snap and ginger. So he arrived at the airdrome of Squadron Forty-nine at twenty minutes before seven o'clock one summer's morning. He was in time to see the morning patrol come in, speeding out of the rosy eastern sky, to alight like twelve birds, daintily upon the grass.

The general admired the sight of that, and regarded closely the twelve flyers who had just landed as they crossed the airdrome to their quarters. Unconscious that the eyes of power, as represented by a brigadier's commission, were upon him, Woodruff, feeling the heat of the morning, threw open his flying coat as he crossed the drome and revealed to Brigadier General Tavistock the soul-quaking fact that British officers went to war in their pajamas.

"That officer!" gasped the general. "What uniform is he wearing?"

"Flying Corps Undress," murmured Renfrew to himself; but to the general he said, "I beg your pardon, General Tavistock?"

"Order those officers to parade for inspection!" blurted the general.

Renfrew didn't believe that he had heard aright.

"Not before breakfast," he protested. "They've been out on early patrol work."

"Now!" snapped the general grimly. "Have them parade immediately."

So, reluctantly, Renfrew advanced and halted the group of flyers who approached their quarters.

"You're in for a strafe," he said, grinning. "Here's a brass hat who wants to examine the uniforms you're wearing. You'll have to line up in front of quarters and stand inspection."

"Wait till we put 'em on," gasped young Farley, referring to uniforms.

"Oh, no," smiled Renfrew. "It's the undress uniform he wants to see. Line up, gentlemen."

"What a stoker!" muttered Gunnyng, who was wishing he'd worn the striped tub silks instead of his khaki flannels; and with his eleven crestfallen comrades, he lined up, at ease.

Renfrew returned to the general and saluted crisply.

"All ready, General Tavistock," he reported coldly.

Completely unconscious of the breach of good taste which he was committing, the man of factory affairs strode up to the waiting line of officers and gentlemen, who stood with impassive faces against the wall of the farmhouse which was their quarters. When the general reached a point ten yards in front of them they snapped smartly to attention, and Renfrew gave them over to the general's inspection with a salute which should have conveyed the resentment of the Flying Corps; but Brigadier General Tavistock was not a sensitive man.

He strode briskly to Gunnyng, who was the first officer in line.

"Open your flying coat, please!" he snapped grimly.

Gunnyng, staring directly through the general's right eye, briskly tore open his flying coat, revealing

his detested pajamas of khaki flannel. The general glanced at this display with grim displeasure and passed on to First Lieutenant Padraic M'Canlon who proudly revealed to his astonished eyes a flowered design of Persian silk. It was a great moment for Paddy.

"This is a disgusting sight," said the general. "Will you inform your squadron, Captain Renfrew, that if ever a member of your personnel is again discovered to have reported for duty improperly dressed, disciplinary action will be taken by Corps Headquarters."

Renfrew saluted.

"I shall so inform them, General Tavistock," he said, and dismissed the twelve culprits without smiling; which was more of an achievement than you may know.

Before the general left the airdrome he was given the opportunity to see the entire commissioned personnel adorned in the regulation uniform of the Flying Corps. It was a moving spectacle, for the old time Flying Corps uniform was heartily detested by the officers and never worn save for the roughest fatigue work; thus the officers of Forty-nine Squadron made an exceedingly frayed and oil-stained showing. The general wondered that a group of officers should so obviously bear the marks of labor, but he was mollified somewhat by the reflection that Squadron Forty-nine no doubt gave far more attention to the technical side of flying than other, more dapper squadrons he had seen. But he didn't forget to dictate orders against improper dress directly he returned to his headquarters.

CHAPTER X

PADDY GOES TO THE BAD

SQUADRON FORTY-NINE read the orders of Brigadier General Tavistock when they were posted in the orderly room, and made many comments which varied in wit but achieved the same degree of criticism. And such was the lightness with which the Flying Corps took disciplinary measures from the General Tavistocks of the late war, that on the following Tuesday First Lieutenant Padraic M'Canlon went forth with C Flight on early morning patrol dressed in his flying coat, flying boots, and his pajamas.

They were the best of pajamas, as all the belongings of Paddy, whose father was a belted earl, were of the best. They were silk pajamas, and they were made gay with alternate stripes of golden yellow and deepest crimson. The stripes were one inch and a half wide. It was one of Lieutenant M'Canlon's most cherished suits of pajamas.

"If I ever come down in Germany with these on," he remarked to Gunnyng, his roommate, "they ought to get me a soft place in the Kaiser's palace. Bet Bill would make me a field marshal if I'd let him wear them for a night."

And as luck would have it, Paddy came as close to

coming down in Germany that morning as any flyer ever came who did not spend the rest of the war as the Kaiser's guest. He had lost the rest of his party in a little disturbance over Cambrai, and had fallen so low, in giving the slip to three German aviators who had persistently tried to get him, that he was barely a thousand feet high, when he saw the German lines below him. He was even in the act of zooming upward to avoid machine gun fire from the ground, which is the most deadly enemy of the airplane, when that machine gun fire was opened upon him.

"Faith," said Paddy as a spray of bullets ripped the fabric all about him, "this is a fine thing to do before breakfast." And he swept around in a neat half roll, to dive into the enemy's fire and let them have a burst from his own two guns.

That brought him lower still, being a maneuver which was in keeping with the design of his pajamas and the general trend of his nature. He almost looped off the ground directly over the German lines, and swept about in a stalling turn to speed for home. As soon as he was far enough from above them to give the gunners deflection, the machine guns opened up again. Again Paddy found himself sitting in a hail of shot.

"Bedad, am I to die before eatin'?" thought Paddy, and he burst into flames. A phosphorus bullet had pierced his petrol tank.

Paddy then called upon his Lord, for to catch fire

in the air is death, and Paddy did not want to die. He thought first of jumping, as all flyers in like dilemma do, but he gave up the thought when he saw the ground so close beneath him, with water glistening in the shell holes, and the peace of a summer's morning over all.

"I can make it!" cried Paddy, with one leather-clad arm across his face and the hot flames against him.

He climbed out on one wing, and, with his hand upon the stick, turned her into a crazy, diving side slip, so that the rush of the air blew the flames away from him.

"When we hit," he reflected, "it is a hard blow we'll be giving the green earth." And with that he hit. He hit the ground with one wing, and so great was the blow of that wing upon the ground that Paddy was thrown from his place and ducked into a shell crater full of mud and water. To the side of the crater the plane crumpled into a leaping furnace.

"Ah," sighed Paddy, as he pulled himself to the edge of the crater. "That bus needed the water more than I did. It will surely discolor me pajamas, and they so fine."

He sat on the edge of the shell hole and felt uncomfortable, for the early summer sun was blazing down upon him, and his wet leather coat weighed many pounds. Also, his great flying boots were full of water, and the feel of wet silk against the body is not pleasant under such an outer covering as that.

"It would not do to die without comfort," said Paddy to himself. So he slid his feet out of the flying

boots and tearing loose the leather coat, he slipped it from him. He now sat in the mud on the brink of the water which filled the hole, clad gorgeously in his silken striped pajamas. The cool embrace of the silk covered him, and the warm sun bathed him cozily.

"Here will I stay until this war is over," chortled Paddy, happily; but the German citizen who manned the machine gun which rested on an emplacement at a point which revealed to the gunner the lovely sheen of those pajamas, decreed otherwise. Amazed and shocked at the sight of a red headed youth sitting on the edge of a shell hole in no man's land clad in nothing more respectable than striped silk, the good German householder who manned that gun let Paddy have it with three different kinds of ammunition.

"Oh, what a blighter!" spluttered Paddy through a mouthful of mud, for he had dived behind the wreckage without stopping to observe the lay of the land, and he snuggled down in the mud while he looked out for safe passage to the British lines.

Fifteen minutes later, an admiring company of Tommies saw the mud-stained pajamas of First Lieutenant Padraic M'Canlon tumble into the trenches with the wearer of them practically invisible behind a camouflage of mud. In the midst of war men see few things thoroughly amusing; they are therefore quick to appreciate the unusually comical—and Paddy was unusually comical.

"Stop laughing," said Paddy at last. "And I'll lick the whole lot of you."

"Wot is it ye want, me lad? that you've come aht withaht yer clo'es on?" inquired a corporal.

"Nothing more than breakfast," said Paddy. "And this." He whisked up a pail of water which stood by and upended it over his head. Then, the mud removed from his countenance, he stood in his clinging and gorgeous raiment and twinkled upon them.

"By rights ye should salute me," he said. "For it's a First Lieutenant of His Majesty's Flying Corps, I am. Where are your officers?"

They stood for a moment and stared at him.

"Orfficers?" said the corporal. "Orfficers didya sye?"

"I said nothing less," grinned Paddy. "Have ye never seen the likes of an officer, or is it a new kind of army I've come to that has no officers? Faith, if it is, we may win the war yet."

"Captain Handlock in command, sir. 'E's dahn the line. The rest of the orfficers is 'avin' breakfast at the 'ouse," reported the corporal. Then, to a man at his side, "Tyke the gentleman dahn to the 'ouse."

Paddy followed his guide in a state of bewilderment and something bordering on nudity, since his wet silk pajamas clung to him as tightly as his skin. It was a queer war, he reflected, in which you were greeted in the trenches with what formal hospitality might be given you by the butler at a country house. And the soldier who led him was thinking that it was a queer war in which officers came to breakfast out of no man's land with nothing on, excepting their pajamas.

The ground sloped away behind the trenches, so that the communication lines spilled out into clear country, and the high ground along which the trenches lay was like a barrier between the Inferno and Arcadia. For the country into which the communication trenches led Lieutenant Paddy M'Canlon was a verdant, rolling valley, in which little, half timbered farmhouses peeped out from groves of trees; in which peasants reaped their hay, and horse-drawn wagons creaked over the grassy fields. This vale, in short, was an indication of the fact that the British line had given way. The trenches had fallen back upon ground untouched by war, and it would remain untouched only so long as the British held that ridge along which the trenches ran.

The communication lines, then, spilled Lieutenant Paddy in his glorious pajamas into this pleasant vale, and his guide led him into a well worn path which led through a grove of trees to the ruin of a farmhouse. But Fritz, in ruining this particular farm, had left two rooms intact, and British engineers had with great skill made weatherproof the ground floor of it without spoiling its shattered resemblance to a complete ruin from the viewpoint of what German aviators might examine it. The result was that officers off duty found it a place of comfortable relaxation between the arduous occupations of trench life, and five companies were able to use it for an ammunition and rations dump.

His guide took Paddy quietly to the improvised

doorway, which, upon his knocking was opened by a youthful captain of the Queen's Own Rifle Corps.

"I'm Lieutenant M'Canlon, of the Flying Corps, skipper," said Paddy. "Forced landing in a shell hole. Sorry for the undress uniform."

The youthful captain seemed to appreciate Paddy's dilemma at once.

"Come in," he hailed cheerily. "Have something to eat."

Paddy thanked his guide and dismissed him. Then he entered the farmhouse. It was the kitchen–living-room–dining-room which he entered, and he found it walled with munition boxes piled to the ceiling while, in the midst of those thousands of pounds of high explosives, a group of some fifteen infantry officers sat on boxes full of hand grenades about a table made of planks on trestles, and held jolly conversation while they breakfasted. He was greeted with cheers and laughter, which held an honest courtesy, and food was placed before the seat they made for him at the table. Whereupon Paddy retired from the conversation to make up for the breakfast he had missed. While he ate his hosts talked shop.

"As beautiful a specimen of brass hat as you'd want to meet," Paddy looked up at the captain who was speaking—a tall, lean fellow, with a twisted nose, whom Paddy liked immediately. "You wouldn't believe there could be such innocence. Wanted to know all about the war, and thought we never stopped firing.

I told him to come down and have tea with us."

"Armchair brigade?" queried another. This was evidently a continuation of a subject which had been under discussion before Paddy's coming. Paddy listened joyfully, while the aroma of strong coffee permeated the still, warm air of the room.

"Not precisely. It seems he's yearned for the thunder of the battle ever since the shindy started. But they put him on transport. He's one of those poisonous fellows who think a war is all brass braid and polished buttons. I sincerely believe he expects to see bands playing up in the line. He wants to ride horseback and wave a sword."

"Is he coming?"

"Lord knows. He might. You never know those fellows. They're often brave as Lucifer until the guns go off. 'Come down to the line,' I said. 'And have a cup of tea. If you play tennis, bring your racket along.' "

"Priceless!" chuckled the captain of the Queen's Own.

" 'It's perfectly safe,' I told him."

"They ought to have let him keep on making chocolates and sell them to Germany. Then we'd have poisoned all the little boys who bang guns at us."

"Chocolates, is it?" cried Paddy suddenly. "Is it chocolates you're talking about?"

"We are," said the captain. "He's a chocolate soldier if ever there was one."

"And what might his name be?" gasped Paddy.

"Brigadier General Tavistock, by the grace of G.H.Q."

"It is the same man," said Paddy. "If he comes here he will have you all court-martialed for not wearing morning clothes for breakfast."

"Have you been night flying, then, that you're dressed in pajamas?" queried the Queen's Own Rifleman.

"I am in pajamas against the orders of your chocolate soldier," said Paddy. "If he comes here, I am telling you—glory be to heaven!" And he rose from his chair with wide eyes gazing upon the doorway which had opened to reveal the presence of Brigadier General Tavistock.

CHAPTER XI

PADDY REFORMS THE GENERAL

THE general stood mute, his eyes fixed upon the gorgeous pajamas of Lieutenant M'Canlon, while every officer in the room snapped to attention and saluted. As though in a trance the general answered the salute. Then,

"Who is in command here?" he rasped.

A major stepped forward.

"Colonel Massee is in his dugout, sir," he said. "I have the honor to be the senior officer present. Major Trescott, sir."

"And am I to understand that the trenches are manned by officers and men dressed only in pajamas?" asked the general.

Now the general was in no sense attached to the infantry. He had come up to the line as a guest of this battalion, and was to that extent off duty. He was now, and not for the first time in his army career, committing a definite breach of good taste, as good taste is known to the front line trenches.

"This gentleman is a guest of the battalion, General Tavistock," said the lean captain with great austerity. "Permit me to present Lieutenant M'Canlon, Royal Flying Corps."

Again the general was staring at Paddy, and this time his face turned red while he stared. It turned redder and redder, until it became tinted with purple.

"It's dangerous enough at the front," whispered a subaltern at the rear of the room, "without going in for apoplexy over the proper thing to wear."

"I should like to meet your colonel," said the general at last in a choked voice. And then the guns went off.

They were distant guns, and they went off in quick sequence. BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM; like that, and swiftly upon each boom of the gun, a clap of sound followed which was the bursting of a shell.

"Posts, gentlemen!" cried the major. "It's a strafe!"

And the room was filled with life. The officers sprang to the equipment which they had laid aside for this moment of relaxation. There were clanks, clicks and rattles in the room, as Sam Brownes were adjusted with the mass of accouterment they bore. And a little rattling whisper went about the room as a dozen officers opened the magazines of as many automatics to see that all was ready for the death they had to deal. Then, like swift messengers, as though starting on a race, they darted from the house; scuttled forth, grabbing pieces of equipment as they went.

"You will stay here, M'Canlon?" asked the major.

"I am not dressed for target practice," said Paddy, highly excited.

"And you, sir," said the major, as he strapped his gear about him. "You have no papers which permit

me to invite you into the trenches. Will you make yourself comfortable here, or will you go back?"

"I'll stay!" snapped the general.

"If they shell this place, I advise you not to," said the major. "You are surrounded by fifteen thousand pounds of high explosive." And, saluting, he dashed forth after his juniors.

"My God!" said the general tragically. "Fifteen thousand pounds!"

"It will be worth watching!" cried Paddy. "I've a mind to go up to the front!" He made for the door.

"You will stay here, Lieutenant M'Candle!" snapped the brigadier. He did not like to be alone in such a crisis. He had not been so near the front before, and the guns sounded loud in his ears.

"The name is M'Canlon, sir," said Paddy, while the din of the guns arose to a chaos of sound. "Capital M, apostrophe, which is short for the Irish Mac, and be the same token testifies to me descent from Irish kings—capital C, a, n, l, o, n. It is a name which has a Gaelic original of the same sound; but I defy you to spell the Gaelic of it, or any other man either, be he Field Marshal Haig himself."

"Fifteen thousand pounds is a lot of explosive to store in one small place," said the general uneasily. "Good heavens, what's that?"

For the battered house had shaken like a thing of paper as a shell burst not a hundred yards away from it.

"It is shrapnel," said Paddy. "That means they're

coming over." And a blast of sound which was made up of many sharp, staccato raps, bore testimony to the soundness of Paddy's prophecy.

"What do you mean by that?" questioned the general nervously. But Paddy, with Irish melancholy, was wondering how many of his breakfast companions had by now been slain.

"What is it you say?" he asked. The general repeated his question.

"Sure, the Kaiser's lads have finished their barrage, and have started the push. Those are machine guns and rifles that you hear. A fine, hellish noise they make, too."

"Do you think our men will hold?" The general was very nervous.

"Maybe," said Paddy. "You cannot tell such things as that. If the first line gives way, Fritz will throw over another barrage to clear the way for a further advance."

"I think we'd better go," said the general.

"I am not returning to Paris in me pajamas," said Paddy with dignity, and he wandered to the doorway, while the general sat disconsolate on a box of hand grenades and watched the slim figure, clad in its ridiculous finery against the morning sunlight, for Paddy had thrown open the door.

The battle was now raging far up and down the line. The ear-piercing rattle of the machine guns drowned the persistent roar of the artillery, and the rifle fire was muffled in the noise of bursting shells.

Over the vale where stood the little house, a pall of blue haze drifted. And then shells began to drop among the trees.

The general saw the grove which sheltered the house leap into the air with a mass of earth and fall like far flung matchsticks back to the shattered ground.

"They're shelling us!" he cried.

"They're coming through!" cried Paddy, and darted back into the room; for he had seen something which the general had not seen. He had seen a stream of khaki figures roll forth from the mouth of the communication trench, and scatter down the valley. The men ran in a manner which is not good to see, and stumbled and fell as they ran, sometimes not to rise again. This was a sign that the Germans had gained a position which permitted them to enfilade the trench with machine gun fire, making it untenable. The routed Tommies streamed out across the vale, making for cover in the woods below the house. Paddy saw them go, taking munition boxes and machine guns with them.

"Fritz will be coming through next!" cried he, as the general peered over his shoulder with a face the color of chalk in a violet sunrise.

"And we've got to run for it across that field?" he faltered; for he was never to forget the sight of those men who stumbled, and sometimes moved upon the ground where they had fallen. Before his eyes he saw the machine guns take their toll, and it sickened him.

Also, he saw men streaming out of the communication trench who were not clad in khaki.

"Be the saints!" cried Paddy. "We will not. This is a munitions dump, and Fritz will not occupy it while two British officers are here!"

So saying he sprang back to a box beside the table, attempted to tear the cover from it with his bare hands. This failing, he sprang at the general, snatched that officer's pistol from its holster, and, using the butt of it hammer-wise, he pounded the top off the box. Swiftly he hauled it to the window, and then paused to pile sacks of comestibles against the closed door.

"Stand in this window!" he barked to the general. "But keep well back. If any of them approach the house, hurl those grenades among 'em as fast as you can! You grab them tightly, pull out that pin, and let go. Wait till they come near enough to get the effect of it, and don't let 'em fall too close to you, or they'll make holes in your tunic! I'm going to mount a gun!" And he was back into the rear room like a streak of crimson and yellow flame.

The general stood with a Mills grenade clutched tightly in his hand, and waited for death. To his surprise the Germans, who streamed through the communication trench, completely ignored the ruined farmhouse, but pressed on beyond it, and sought positions on higher ground from which to direct their fire upon the woods where the British were sheltered. This gave the general a sense of relief, but it presented at the same time the awful problem of whether, thus en-

veloped in the German lines, he could surrender himself without being fired on first.

As though in answer to his problem, Paddy M'Canlon staggered forth from the rear room, carrying a Vickers gun on a tripod. This he set down by the window, and then darted back again to bring forth a case of munition belting which he had loaded while the general watched.

He fed the belting into the gun, and placed it very carefully.

"I've put another at the back," he said. "And if they give us time, we'll rig another through that peep-hole in the door. We can make a platform of cases."

He peeped out for a moment to see how the land lay, and was in time to see the first attack of the German troops from their new position. This consisted of a hearty and vigorous machine gun fire from the height of land opposite the farmhouse.

"Good!" cried Paddy. "Now we have a chance to surprise them."

And while the hypnotized general stood and watched with the grenade still clutched in his hand, Paddy, unconscious of the astonishing spectacle his pajamas provided, built up his platform of munition boxes at the door and mounted a Vickers gun upon it which could be fired through the little square peep-hole common to French farmhouse doors.

He had just completed this job when the general, aroused by the appearance of German troops as they poured forth from the woods to rush the position they

had been punishing with the machine guns, found his voice.

"We are hopelessly trapped!" he cried. "We must surrender. Look! They are moving forward!"

"Just the trick!" cried Paddy, and he swung on to the general a pair of flaming blue eyes. "Now stand by that gun!" he roared. "Aim it at their feet and pull the trigger. If you hit low, raise. High, lower it. That's all you've got to do! Now. When I say so!"

He waited until the field-gray men were advancing across the field his guns commanded. Then he gave the word, and from that ruined farmhouse, which the German officers had seen and passed over as a thing of no consequence, there poured a stream of death.

Immediately a company of field-gray men were turned to the farmhouse. But they met only the expert marksmanship of Paddy M'Canlon, which was devastating. The general, too, did damage. Directly he felt the gun leaping under his hand; directly he felt the power he controlled, his fears gave way to a queer exhilaration. Manfully he fired his gun, and shrewdly he aimed it. Enfiladed, the German line wavered, turned, met Paddy's fire, and received in their backs a renewed fire from the British retreat.

"Up and at 'em!" yelled Paddy. "Oh, come on out of those woods and make your push!"

His voice held irritation and disgust, for now, his fighting Irish soul told him, was the psychological

moment for the British troops to use the bayonet. And even as he raved against their tardiness, the khaki line of the Queen's Own Rifles emerged from the woods and rushed across that vale.

They came on with a great shout, and the Germans, distracted, knew not which way to turn. Paddy's machine gun jammed as they turned toward the house, and he leaped up to the window with an armful of grenades.

"Get back! Back, you field mice!" he yelled gleefully, and hurled his missiles with deadly precision while the general's gun spat death beside his shoulder. The oncoming Germans swerved again, and the shouting Riflemen were upon them from the rear. Up went a sea of hands, and the Queen's Own enveloped that group of Germans as an insweeping tide envelops the outlying beaches. The khaki swarm did not stop, but swept on, to reoccupy their trenches, and Paddy sallied forth in his flaming raiment, to help the party left behind to care for the prisoners.

He took them back to the house where the general greeted them, his eyes agleam with the enthusiasm of the fighting.

"Lieutenant M'Canlon," he said, "let me shake your hand. You have saved my life."

"Faith!" said Paddy. "I never even thought of it."

"Is there anything I can do for you?" asked the general somewhat less warmly.

"Sure an' there is," said Paddy. "Take me back

to me squadron in your fine staff car." He grinned as he saw the general's predicament.

"It is a small thing to do for a man who has saved your life," he pointed out.

"I'll do it," said the general, handsomely. "I have to rescind those rather impulsive orders regarding proper dress."

And Squadron Forty-nine, which had been mourning Paddy since the early morning, as one dead, greeted Brigadier General Tavistock, seated in all his glory beside that unforgettable figure in the extraordinary pajamas, as no officer had ever been greeted at a British mess before.

The further reform of the general was exemplified in his action when he was offered the Distinguished Service Order for his gallant conduct in defending an ammunition dump and turning a retreat into a victory for British forces. The general declared that he could not possibly accept the decoration unless First Lieutenant Padraic M'Canlon, who had been of indispensable assistance to him in that achievement, received a like recognition. So Paddy was given a Military Cross, which he ever afterward referred to as a chocolate frosting.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST FIGHT OF BOB WORDEN

RENFREW came into the mess one dull, foggy afternoon in May and found a group of pilots, newly assigned to his squadron, who had just arrived for the useful purpose of making up casualties. Most of the officers of the squadron were off at Amiens for the day, enjoying that boon which the Flying Corps appreciated to the utmost—a day of care-free and fear-free leisure when the weather was too bad for flying.

It fell, then, to Renfrew, who had been off for a flight of visiting down the line, to entertain the newcomers and see them provided with quarters for the night—and the first man he greeted was Bob Worden. It was a memorable meeting, which was celebrated in proper style that evening at Amiens.

One reason Bobby and seven other pilots of ripe experience had been assigned to fill the gaps in the ranks of the Forty-ninth was indicated by the Orders for the Day, which had recently taken a highly businesslike note. Day after day, the S.E.'s went up to accompany observation planes, to convoy photographers and two-seaters that carried brass hats or staff officers up and down the line; or they went up in flights and double flights with strict orders that at any cost they were to

keep all enemy airplanes from passing the line. As a result other pilots of ripe experience came in little, quiet groups from day to day to fill up more gaps in the ranks of the Forty-ninth Overseas Squadron, R.F.C. In short, there was every indication that Headquarters was planning a big push along the Ypres salient.

The observers were up to spot with field glasses and camera the positions of German artillery, machine gun nests, communications, and entrenchments; the brass hats were back and forth supervising, inspecting, and preparing the way for the inscrutable plots and plans that were the secrets of all brass hats on such occasions; and the enemy planes could never be allowed to pass over the lines on such days as saw the long lines of trucks bringing troops up to the front, and the columns of marching men which wove through the muddy ways of communication trenches.

On the particular day when the skies rained fiery bullets down on Bobby Worden, he was up over the lines, with three other scouts of the Forty-ninth, convoying two stately, square-rigged R.E.8's on their mission of taking photographs. With his two companions he swept and swerved and fleetly skimmed the skies one thousand feet above the slow, leisurely observers, and while he did it, he kept his weather eye unceasingly alert for the frail, distant form of enemy aircraft. Below him the observers were occupied with their unceasing survey of the tragic theater of the western front.

In a peculiar way that word "theater" is hardly a figure of speech. The Ypres salient had been for three years a theater, and the Germans had for three years occupied the balcony seats.

In a yellow desolation of mud and ruined farms the town of Ypres lay three thousand feet below those observers, a gigantic and pitiable heap of rubbish that had once been factories, offices, market places, and homes. That mighty ruin, which had become a mighty shambles, where men, the color of mud, moved in a sea of mud, was the foremost point of the salient. On either side of the devastated city the fighting line fell away toward the green fields, webbed with roads and railways, which was France. Back of the German lines, two or three miles to the east and south of this salient, arose the ridges of Wytschaete and Passchendaele, which were occupied by the Germans in a maze of machine gun nests, mortar emplacements, barbed wire entanglements and man traps. From these ridges the Germans could look down upon Ypres as an audience in the balcony looks down upon the stage. They saw every movement of the British troops as they went about the daily business of the war in that devastated theater and, because of their position on that eminence, they had made the Ypres salient for three years strategically untenable.

But the British didn't seem to know this. For three years they held that untenable position while the German guns unceasingly drained away their forces and made life over into death for the men who lived there

in the mud. Later, when the German advance of 1918 narrowed that slim, muddy promontory to the breaking point, while the Kaiser's troops marched victoriously into France on both sides of it, the Ypres salient still held; and when America came to turn the battle about the other way and free British troops all up and down the line for the work of driving the Germans out of Belgium, the Ypres salient still stood, with the blood of more than a million men to hallow it, as the one spot in all the western front that the Germans never passed.

There it lay, below the preoccupied airmen, and while Bobby looked down upon the green and yellow ridges of Passchendaele, he could not know that the power which had sent him high aloft to protect the work of those photographers had also decreed that for the last two years skilled engineers should have been burrowing a maze of subterranean galleries under those placid hills so that when the offensive should start, in less than a week's time, Germany's balcony seats would be hurled into the air by more than a million pounds of high explosive. He only knew that no harm must come to those photographs, and knowing it, his eyes swept horizons that were more important to him just then than Passchendaele or Wytschaete ridge. It was as well that he did so for, while the R.E.8's droned below him and his comrades skimmed in close formation at his tail, he saw the enemy planes coming.

In the far sky they appeared like frail dragon flies, the sunlight catching their wings. They were high above Bobby's altitude, and Bobby shot forth a rocket

from his Very pistol to signal the demand for action at the same time that he counted the coming foe and began to climb in spirals to meet them. His two comrades, knowing in advance what tactics were expected of them, gave forth a burst of machine gun fire to warn the R.E.8's, and followed happily the smoky trail of their leader. The slow, cumbersome R.E.8's, with their precious photographs, turned immediately back for the airdrome, and the three scouts circled as they climbed to cover the retreat.

One, two, three, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, counted Bobby. Twelve Fokker scouts were speeding down upon them from the east, and it looked as if the S.E.'s, with all their speed and power, would not be able to gain sufficiently to meet them at an equal altitude.

"No go!" said Bobby to himself, as he saw that the race was lost. "They've got the height; we'll have to see how they use it." And, throwing his machine over into a steep bank, he circled in widening and narrowing curves; for it is not good to have an enemy dive upon you from above while you are flying straight.

But it would not be good, either, to have them pass above him and dart down upon the R.E.8's, which they could easily overtake. So Bobby bided his time and, as a trapeze artist calculates the swing of his trapeze, so Bobby calculated the swing of his lightning turns so that he came out of one as the enemy, above him, were within range of his gun, five hundred yards to the eastward. He tilted up the nose of his machine then, so that it fairly hung upon its prop, and with the enemy

flying straight toward him, he singled out a German machine and let him have it.

He saw the German he had fired at veer off into a sideslip and drop some hundreds of feet. Then the machine straightened out, and curved in a badly made bank. From this it fell into a spin, and didn't straighten out until it was on Bobby's level.

Bobby at once decided that he had wounded his man, and he darted in to finish the combat, whereupon his opponent did an Immelman turn, which is achieved by hurling yourself at the blue heavens and sliding sideways out of it. Thus he came back at Bobby and started spitting death. Bobby zoomed to get above him, heard the rattle of machine guns above, and saw the sky full of German machines diving down upon him. He missed the man who had tricked him, and looped to come up behind him. When he again faced eastward, it was to see one of his own comrades going to pieces in the air, and Dakin, the other, sweeping groundward with his engine dead. Bobby was trapped.

It occurred to him that he might turn tail and make for home, but that would be escorting the Germans, so to speak, to the destruction of the invaluable R.E.8's. Therefore, he must fight, and he did so feeling grimly certain that the fight was to be his last.

Two bursts of machine gun fire had already riddled the fabric and splintered some struts of his plane, and he saw all about him the fiery tracks of the inflammable bullets his enemies were raining upon him. The rattle of their guns was in his ears, and the sting of a hun-

dred splinters about his neck and cheeks. They worked well together, this group of enemies, and he saw that they were turning him away from the lines as he twisted, looped, and spun to get away from the hail of their fire. Occasionally as he carried his machine through these wild gyrations, he caught sight of a German machine across his nose. When this happened, he straightened out, and tried for the enemy, but always his straightening out became a signal for attack from the circling planes that were awaiting it.

He finally managed to get below them, and found himself seeking the protection of wild flying, while they circled with exasperating patience at various altitudes over him. He decided then that the R.E.'s would have had start enough, and that his only hope was a dash for home. So he stopped his circling, flew up straight into the blue, swerved away from them, set his nose straight at the British line, and opened his throttle wide. It was at this point that Renfrew came up.

CHAPTER XIII

RENFREW TAKES A HAND

RENFREW had been off on a lone scouting trip. He had been looking for German planes without success and was returning home. On his way to the airdrome he had approached the lines to the south of Ypres, and had been attracted by the machine gun fire of Bobby's little show. He turned from his course at once and flew to the area of battle.

Bobby's assailants had been so preoccupied with their quarry that they did not notice his approach. Bobby was trying for the British lines to the northeast; so it was to that point their attention was turned when Renfrew sailed up from the southwest. He saw Bobby straighten out into that wild try for the lines, and he saw the enemy planes spread out fanwise, to center their fire on the plane which they pursued. Renfrew himself was higher than any of the others, and came roaring down upon them with his nose down and his engine going full blast. He must have sailed into that party at a speed of more than one hundred and fifty miles an hour, but he didn't let them have the first blast of his machine guns until after they had got Bobby well in range and let him have it.

Bobby heard the rattle of their guns, and even as he

felt the numbing impact of several bullets in his right leg, he thanked his guardian angel that they had fired too low. Had they fired a few feet higher, his machine would have gone to pieces and he himself been riddled, for the contents of ten machine guns sought for him at once.

Realizing that he was hit and hit badly, Bobby gritted his teeth, prayed for consciousness until he should land, and kicked his machine into a spin. They were still far enough behind him to concentrate their fire upon his spinning plane, and he wondered why they didn't do this. He didn't find out why they didn't until he reached the ground.

This he achieved through an eternity of pain and fear of fainting. Down, down, he spun, until the whirling world below him seemed too close; then he eased his controls and fell into a dive. He was shocked to see the fields so close to him, and pulled up his machine again, even as he pulled her up to straighten out for his first landing. But this was an S.E., not a Curtiss J.N.4, and the crash he made was epic. Yet again his angel guarded him. He broke a rib, but did not lose consciousness. He scrambled out of the wreckage, and immediately fell to the grass-covered earth with a feeling as though molten metal had been poured upon his leg. In an agony of pain he lay there, moaning; and while he lay there, he saw in the sky above him the reason why the enemy had not followed him down.

High above him a single British scout was fighting in the air with eleven Fokker fighting men; and even as

he looked, Bobby saw the enemy's forces reduced to ten.

The twelve Fokkers had become eleven on the first blast of Renfrew's gun, for he had taken them unaware, and had had to do no more than take a careful aim. The second man, however, fell less easily. With the first round of his gun they had turned upon him. He had dipped, swerved to keep between them and his retreat to the British lines, and had then flown straight as a die into their massed formation. His gun blazed as he came at them, and their formation broke as the individual flyers strove to avoid that gun fire. They knew by the manner of his attack that they had to do with a man who could fight in the air.

Renfrew had learned long since that when you're outnumbered in the air, a determined attack is the best defense. Not one flyer in a hundred is free of the haunting sense that only his conscious thought and a few thin wires and struts are between him and a ghastly fall. Bullets, well aimed, will achieve that fall in the most ghastly known way, and the thing to play upon in air fighting is that weakness which exists in the best of men, and makes them, when ten thousand feet above the ground in a tricky little scouting plane, shy of the gun fire of any man who does not seem worried about it.

Renfrew flew into that group of Fokkers as though they were so many wild geese, and they gave way for him. He picked a plane that was on the extreme far side of the German formation, and flew directly at it.

The others swooped out of his way to avoid crashing, and Renfrew immediately found himself completely surrounded by the foe. Thus he placed himself in comparative safety, for now no German could fire upon him without fear of hitting his own men, while he, surrounded by German machines, had only to maneuver in such a manner as would maintain this advantage for him, while at the same time he obtained an occasional target. Thus he could do a remarkable amount of damage. And he did it—while battered Bobby Worden watched from the field below.

Renfrew brought down his second plane, that plane on the extreme far side of the German formation, by shooting across the bows of a man who had looped to avoid him. He then swerved to avoid crashing the looper, and next, throwing his machine on its side, did a vertical spiral that brought him back into the center of things again.

Also, it brought him on to the tail of a German who swooped upward into a climbing turn that changed into a terrible, sidewise fall, as Renfrew's gun spoke and the man in that plane died. Bobby, forgetful of his pain, saw that sidewise fall—saw Renfrew's third plane dive like a plummet for the earth, the machine breaking up in the air as the speed of the dive tore the wings from it.

Then a German who was above Renfrew dived almost perpendicularly to get him. Renfrew looped, and saw the larger number of his foes straightening out for Germany. He twisted out of his loop on the top of

it, achieving a neat half roll, and sped roaring after the elopers. With a straight line upon them he fired two bursts from his gun, and the group broke up, turning in various directions to avoid his fire.

Renfrew turned as the enemy turned and, giving them his back, sped in his terrible bee-line directly at the three planes that had been left behind. The Germans behind him could not shoot at him without hitting the men he was attacking. That was his strategy—the strategy of Ball, and McCudden, Guynemer, and Boelke. He always kept between two fires, and, with eyes at the back of his head, eyes of sense, saw to it that he kept in line between all the opponents he could thus frustrate.

The three men he approached broke up and he had to give them up lest, in following one of them, he give another a free sight of himself against the open sky. He whirled about and caught one of the oncoming planes that he had chased toward Germany in a straight line with his deflection sight. Immediately he let him have the gun. And Bobby, watching from below, saw the unfortunate man's machine burst into flames—saw Renfrew's fourth plane go blazing downward.

Instantly Renfrew turned again, and only just in time, for one Fokker, which had been trailing him patiently since the start of this mad warfare, let go with a burst of incendiary bullets directly that fourth man was hit, for Renfrew, in dropping that fourth man, had removed the only obstacle to his patient foe's clear aim. Renfrew looped out of the danger line with the tail of

his machine riddled with many a bullet that had escaped his body only by a hair's breadth. The man who trailed him passed beneath as Renfrew looped, and the others swept swiftly after him. When Renfrew came out of his loop it was to see six Fokker planes (for two had already gone) speeding off in a rapidly organizing formation for the safe territory beyond the German lines.

Renfrew knew he could not follow far, for his petrol supply was low, but he could not let these men depart after having seen Bobby sent down to what he supposed was death; so he gave chase; and the one who had trailed him throughout the fight turned back to meet him.

The Fokker turned on a climbing turn, striving to gain height over Renfrew's swift machine. As it happened, the German pilot made a mistake in this, for Renfrew had a trick for just that kind of attack. As the German rose, Renfrew dipped. Thus he was obscured from the German pilot's sight by the German's own lower wing; and as the German straightened out from his turn, Renfrew fired. His fire raked the German craft from stem to stern and, filled with pity, Renfrew saw his gallant opponent veer away into that side slip which precedes the dive or spin of every good flyer gone west in the upper reaches of the air.

And again, down below, Bobby watched the tragic, hurtling fall of an enemy plane—Renfrew's fifth in his single-handed fight.

By that time the other five German planes were out

of sight, and Renfrew turned to examine the ground for signs of Bobby's crash. When he saw in a field far below him and well behind the British lines, the shattered white evidences of Bob's landing, he shut off his engine and in such beautiful, wide circles as an S.E.5 can make glided down to land beside the broken plane.

That is the story of how Renfrew brought down his eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, twenty-first and twenty-second enemy airplanes, told as Bobby Worden reported it to Headquarters—told as it was retold when *Flight,* the journal of the Flying Corps, announced that for this service, Captain Douglas Renfrew, British Columbia Horse, attached to the Royal Flying Corps, had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

When Renfrew landed beside the wreck of Bobby's plane, he found the field in which young Worden had landed alive with officers and men of various branches of the service who, having seen the battle from afar, had hurried to the scene of the landing and given the fallen aviator their assistance. Bobby had need of that. He was so badly wounded in his right leg, and the broken rib so fiercely pained him, that between loss of blood and sheer torture, it is doubtful if he could have remained conscious as long as he did, had it not been for the stimulus which that view of Renfrew's battle gave him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREATER BATTLE

BOBBY WORDEN came out from under the influence of the ether they had given him while they dressed his wounds and set the broken rib, only to be informed that his right leg was in danger of infection and must be amputated if he would avoid an attack of lockjaw. Instantly, there flashed across Bobby's mind a vivid picture of the folks at home greeting him as he returned on one leg from the wars. It just wouldn't do at all.

"You all leave that leg right where it is," he said. "There's no kind of lockjaw that can get me after all Ah've been through."

"Orders are orders," said the surgeon major in command of the hospital. "And I'm in command here. We're taking that leg off at three pip emma this day."

Whereupon Bobby sat up in his bed despite the efforts of the nurse to keep him down, and swore a mighty oath.

"You'll leave that leg be!" he swore, his eyes blazing fire on the surgeon major. "It's my leg, and if Ah get lockjaw it'll be my lockjaw. Ah guess any man who's lived through as many crazy orders as Ah have has got a right to decide how he wants to die if he's to die

in a hospital. When Ah go back home, Ah'm plannin' to take that leg with me!"

The surgeon major smiled in a way that doctors have, but Bobby would not be gainsaid.

"If you cut off my leg," he threatened, "Ah'll just die out of hand to spite you."

"All right," said the surgeon major, filled with admiration that made him desire to weep. "But if you feel a great pain running through all your veins, and a nasty tendency about your jaws to form a rigid tension, just yell for a nurse, because that's lockjaw, and we'll have to get a wedge in your teeth."

Bobby grinned his thanks, and went back to sleep. But in the night came the pain and the stiffening and, after that, the wedge, and two nurses to hold him down while he writhed and made strange noises in delirium and agony. They pumped serum into him and fed him through a tube until the deadly germ was overcome and Bobby came out of it with his leg still intact but very painful.

So the surgeon major came again, and again he hid a desire to weep behind a pleasant smile. Bobby lay in bed and hid behind his pleasant smile a desire to shriek out the agony that twinges of hot fire gave his bullet-riddled leg.

"It's no use, sonny," said the surgeon major. "That leg has got to come off. We can't seem to get the infection out of it, and it's a small enough chance for life you've got as it is."

In a ghastly way Bobby maintained his pleasant smile.

"You can't do it!" he muttered firmly. "If Ah die, Ah'm dying with both legs on, and there's neither man nor devil can take one or the other of 'em off!"

The surgeon major shook his head, still smiling.

"Sorry, old man, but we can't let you die without a fight for it," he said. And Bobby saw in the surgeon major's weary gray eyes the unalterable fact.

So all the agony and pain had been for nothing. All the terrible fight that he had put up against the voice that had shrieked out within him to die, die, die, and end the pain and fire that was torturing him, was to go for nothing. Haggard, with panic in his black eyes, breathing such little, panting breaths as the pain in his chest would let him breathe, Bobby surged upward against the weight of weariness that pressed him down upon the bed.

"No! No! No!" he cried. "You can't do it! You won't do it! Ah'll fight it out with the infection! Ah'll fight it out with lockjaw, blood poisoning, or plague! I will! I will!" His voice had risen frantically, and the surgeon major had come to the side of his bed and sat there, trying in vain to silence him.

"Don't break up, old man. Calm does it," he murmured. But Bobby would not be silenced.

"Don't take it off! You can't! Ah won't let you! Ah'll fight!" And then, clutching the surgeon major's arm, clinging to him, pleading shamelessly: "Oh, don't! Please don't! Don't cripple me for life!"

At that moment Renfrew entered the ward and strode quickly to Bob's bedside. Bobby greeted him with a joy that overcame agony and fear. His face was drawn and wasted, his great black eyes were dark lanterns reflecting his young, tortured spirit, and tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Don't let them, Doug! Don't let them!" he cried. "They're goin' to take off my leg!" and he fell to a murmurous sobbing, while he stared in terrible despair at the white ceiling.

Renfrew caught the surgeon's eye, and that officer arose to step away from the bedside with him and talk in low voiced conference while outside planes droned overhead with rising and falling roars of engine blast, and far away the unceasing guns filled the air with sullen reverberations.

"I'm afraid of another attack of the lockjaw," the surgeon major was saying. "It's nip and tuck as it is."

"But how about the operation?" asked Renfrew. "That would take it out of him badly, wouldn't it?"

The surgeon major agreed that an amputation would be an exceedingly heroic measure.

"But no man," he said, "is given the grace to survive more than one attack of tetanus. He wouldn't have come through the first one if he hadn't determined to. He just fought his way through."

"That sounds as though it's a matter of fight, either way, and surely he'll fight better to save his leg than to lose it?"

The surgeon caught Renfrew's eye again, and you are to remember that every officer and man the length and breadth of the western front had great respect for Renfrew in those days. The surgeon nodded his head.

"That's right," he said.

"Then we'll let him keep it?"

Frowning, the surgeon major nodded.

"He'll have to pull through," he muttered, as Renfrew turned back to the bed. "We'll *have* to bring him through."

"It's all right, Bobby," Renfrew was saying. "You can keep your leg, all right. And now . . . now, old man, all you've got to worry about is another little attack of lockjaw."

And Renfrew hurried away because, strangely enough, he found that in the face of Bobby's joy he, too, desired to weep.

He did not stay away, for the weather, after that great push for Passchendaele ridge was bad for flying, and Renfrew managed to be close to Bobby's bedside in all the awful hours through which young Worden writhed through his second attack of tetanus; and when Bobby came to himself again, his friend was at his side.

It was such adventures as that which Renfrew had beside Bobby's bed that caused the great war to age a man, and, although Renfrew saw something of Bobby in brief glimpses while he limped about the gardens of an English convalescent home, and although he saw him off on the liner that took him to America, proudly

walking the decks with the help of a mere cane, Renfrew regretted vastly that he could not have been in Bobby Worden's home when Bob got back. He felt that to have witnessed that home-coming might have made him young again.

CHAPTER XV

SECRET SERVICE

THE most amazing thing about the world war was that it was quite impossible. It was almost entirely made up of incidents that couldn't possibly happen.

Every one who was wise, and expert, and well informed, agreed at the beginning that the great nations of modern times could not go to war because it was too costly, and because modern weapons made it impossible for human beings to exist on the field of battle. But no less than eight great nations plunged into the conflict and twenty millions of men proceeded to live and breathe in a no man's land where, from above, the observer would have sworn that not an ant could be alive. Thousands of men mounted into the air on kites and fought battles to the death high above the clouds; battles which every one knew were entirely impossible outside the romantic story books. And a vast number of men calmly went forth in gigantic submarines and enacted all the impossible adventures of Jules Verne's impossible heroes.

The British Navy reserved a diving tender for the exclusive use of a little group of men whose lot it was to dive into unfathomable depths wherever a submarine was sunk, and enter impenetrable hulks to gain

possession of unobtainable papers written in an undecipherable code which the intelligence office promptly deciphered. Week after week absolutely invulnerable positions were taken by troops which were too exhausted to fight, and innumerable men, women and children were slain in places which no enemy could possibly reach. But of all the impossible things which that magical war made possible, the workings of the intelligence systems were the most remarkable.

There were quiet gentlemen who trod the German lines in German uniform, to appear and disappear like ghosts, for no other purpose than to inform the Headquarters of the Allies what the German armies were going to do. And ever and anon word would reach various sectors of our front that a certain jaunty young British officer who had been visiting our messes and fraternizing with the officers of the line must be apprehended. But a search would reveal the fact that the visitor had vanished into thin air, carrying with him all that he had learned of our plans and disposition, to place it before the German staff. On both sides of the line they appeared and disappeared. Spies and counter-spies who fought in the war with their wits. Very elusive they were, seldom falling into the trap that always awaited them; seldom dying the death with which they played. Always, at the last minute, as the alarm went forth for them, they vanished into thin air. That is precisely what they did. Into the thin air they vanished, and often the plane which carried them did not return.

Renfrew learned something of the magic wherewith this was accomplished by becoming the owner of Bracher's Pfaltz biplane. That little German fighting craft had not been in the hangars of Squadron Forty-nine three days before Renfrew received orders to report at General Headquarters. And he had not had the orders fifteen minutes before a beautiful green-gray car appeared to carry him to his assignment.

At Headquarters which were established in a venerable manor house, he was guided through the efficient bustle of innumerable exquisitely clad officers bedecked in gold braids and many colored tabs, to a great room paneled in oak which was black with age, and furnished with shelves and tables of unpainted boards. When Renfrew entered this room, its sole occupant was a lean, blond young man, who wore a uniform modeled elegantly to his form, and who fairly sparkled with burnished leather and polished brasses. The tabs on his lapels were green, and his gold laced hat was banded with green as well. This was Colonel Talbot, of the Intelligence Staff.

"Captain Renfrew?" he asked, as Renfrew saluted. "Sit down." He indicated a chair, and immediately attacked the business in hand.

"You managed to bring a German scouting machine over the lines, and land it intact at your squadron airdrome?" he asked.

Renfrew nodded. The awful suspicion dawned upon him, that maybe the Intelligence Department was going to make him an official trapper of German scouts.

"The German flyer gave it to me," he said. "We landed in Holland, and he was badly wounded. We couldn't both return, and he was a sportsman. He let me fly his bus back."

Talbot lifted his brows in disbelief.

"You are decidedly modest, Captain Renfrew," he said, and dismissed the subject by pressing a bell push. "The fact is," he said, "that we have a very special use for that Pfaltz machine, and we have received permission from the air ministry to use your coöperation in the matter."

Renfrew grinned at the suave young man's manner of informing him that he was to take his orders from the Intelligence Office.

"Glad to be of service," he said.

"It's a species of ferrying," smiled Talbot, and he turned to the orderly sergeant who had answered his ring. "Ask Captain Bloom to come in," he said.

"Captain Bloom," he explained to Renfrew, "is kind enough to cross the lines occasionally to obtain information for us."

The door opened again, and Renfrew saw a rather stiff young man stride into the room and deliver as smart a salute as he had ever seen accomplished.

"Captain Bloom," said Talbot, rising, "meet Captain Renfrew, of the Flying Corps."

Bloom bowed crisply, and Renfrew found himself examined by a pair of very keen blue eyes.

"I have heard of Captain Renfrew's many brave exploits," said Bloom gravely.

"That sounds as if there's been a leak in the colonel's department," said Renfrew, with equal gravity. "I thought my exploits were a secret."

Talbot smiled with just the right amount of appreciation, and Bloom examined Renfrew with his impossibly blue eyes as though he didn't like what the flyer had said.

"It has been Captain Bloom's custom to get behind the German lines for us by our coöperation with the Flying Corps," Talbot belied all tradition by being an Englishman who stuck to business. "We have managed to have a plane take him over and drop him on enemy territory in the evening, and fly back for him at his convenience."

Renfrew gazed upon Bloom with a new interest. He had heard rumors of this extraordinary procedure, but had always doubted that any man could be procured who would engage in such a suicidal enterprise.

"He has been very fortunate so far," continued Talbot, as if he were discussing the movement of freight in the Middle West. "He has been very fortunate in getting back to us safely, but the flyers have not been so lucky. The Germans seem to look for them and spot them as they land, with the result that Captain Bloom has seen seven of our best flyers captured or shot down while he waited in hiding, to board their machines." He turned to Renfrew with the imperturbable expression of a leader who is bored by an obstacle which holds up a game that he has no doubt whatever will be won as he means it to be won. "I think that

we are temporarily at the end of our tether as far as using our own planes is concerned," he explained. "But if a clever flyer, flying one of their own machines, should have a forced landing on German soil, and stop long enough, say, to let a man alight, or to let a man climb on his wing, I can't for the life of me see how they could question the incident."

Renfrew sat and gazed at the long, heavy sweep of Captain Bloom's clean-shaven jaw, and turned the idea over in his mind.

"Of course," he said, "I'd have to know exactly what field to land in, and it would have to be big enough to take off from without taxiing into position. I mean that I'd have to land and take off without pausing, so to speak."

"Precisely," said Bloom. "I have aërial photographs which will make that clear to you."

"And can I be sure of flying a Pfaltz over the lines without being fired on by our own men?" asked Renfrew.

"That has been taken care of," said Talbot. "Your plane is even now being painted certain definite colors. By to-night every flyer on the western front will have confidential instructions to follow but not fire upon any Pfaltz biplane of that design. If you fire a burst of blanks at them, they will retreat. That will insure you of acting out your part. You will carry two machine guns, one of which will be loaded with blanks."

Renfrew still gazed at Bloom.

"And what if you are not there, when I come to get you?" he asked.

Bloom smiled heavily.

"I will be there," he said. "If not, you must not wait for me."

"All those details, you can arrange between you," said Talbot. "Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"Nothing more," said Renfrew.

"Good." Talbot held out his hand. "I may say, Captain Renfrew, that this service will be appreciated. If you can overcome the difficulty of landing these officers in Germany and returning them again, you will be remembered in our reports."

"Thanks," said Renfrew, and he went with Bloom to study the fascinating photographs, which, pieced together, composed a bird's-eye view of a vast territory behind the German lines.

CHAPTER XVI

DANGEROUS FLYING

IN the late afternoon of the day following his visit to the efficient Colonel Talbot, Renfrew climbed into the cockpit of the little Pfaltz biplane, which was now painted gray-green with stripes of somber crimson. Also the machine had been altered to the extent of introducing behind the pilot's seat a tiny nook within the fuselage, which, although it was designed to secrete Renfrew's passenger, appeared hardly large enough to accommodate a fair-sized dog.

This machine Renfrew caused to be rolled out into the runway, where he ran up the engine until it roared true to his trained ear. Then he waved the mechanics away from his wings, opened his throttle, and took to the air. He flew, straight as a bee, to the tiny airdrome which was to be his quarters during this extraordinary service, and landed lightly on its grass, to pick up the blue-eyed Captain Bloom.

Bloom came forth from the hangar in which he had been waiting, and approached the machine slowly. Renfrew noticed that slow stride, and noticed, too, the pallor of the secret agent's face. Bloom was obviously air-shy.

"Not much room for you," he said cheerily, as the

passenger approached. "But I guess you can crawl in."

"You have not got the phones on!" snapped Bloom in reply. "You must put the phones on, so that I can tell you what to do."

Renfrew was nettled by his tone. There had been no talk of who was to be in command on such a flight as this, and he did not relish the harsh manner in which Bloom seemed to convey that he was to give the orders. Phones, such as were provided to permit instructors to make their instructions heard by their pupils above the engine's roar, had been installed in this plane to permit Bloom to communicate with the pilot. Renfrew, with that impatience for cumbering gear which all scout pilots learned, had neglected to place the ear phones over his helmet. He did so now.

"Hop in," he said gruffly. "There's not much time."

"You fly well?" Bloom questioned fearfully.

And Renfrew was cruel.

"Can't tell what might happen in a strange machine," he grinned. "Besides, it's a one-seater. Your weight will make it tail heavy, and that's bad for spins."

Then, after the secret agent had crawled in, and stowed himself uncomfortably in his cramped quarters; after Renfrew had opened his engine to its fullest blast and roared down the runway to leap into the air as a great fish leaps from the water; after they were well away, and droning evenly toward the high blue

sky, Renfrew heard the nervous voice of his passenger grating into his ear through the phones.

"Don't do any stunting," warned that voice. "We have no time to waste."

And Renfrew wondered that a man who could carry his life so lightly in his hands as this man's work demanded that he carry his, should be so little able to control the fear which this journey into the air so obviously aroused in him.

They flew eastward with the yellow sunlight of late afternoon behind them, and they flew directly into a sky filled with British planes returning from a dog fight. Renfrew, guiltily conscious that his plane carried enemy markings, dropped to a lower level, as he saw his comrades flitting toward him, and they amply testified to the efficiency of Colonel Talbot's machinery, by turning in a fine sweep of diving planes, and sitting on his tail, whereupon Renfrew did a stalling turn, and blazed away upon them with his left hand gun which was loaded with blanks. In beautiful concert he saw seven Camels and five S.E.'s swing about and flee into the west, and, his heart high with the thrill of it, he threw the Pfaltz over into a vertical bank to twist it about into his given direction.

"I told you to fly straight!" crackled the voice in the phone. "Don't stunt! Fly straight! You'll kill us both!"

"Get out and walk, if you don't like it!" said Renfrew to the air about him; and then, spying his chosen field, he shut off his engine, and started his downward

glide. It was a risky trick, this game that he was playing, and he knew that very well. As he slid down the air, with his wires whistling, he felt as though every hedge and copse on the ground beneath concealed a dozen observers or a nest of guns. He had never before felt such an extraordinary sense of flying into the mouth of a cannon, of plunging into certain disaster. The cast iron nerve of the man behind him, who had done this, not once, but a hundred times, and at that was clad in a uniform which, in the event of capture would convict him immediately of being a spy, impressed itself on Renfrew during that downward glide with all the force of the fact. Bloom, afraid though he might be of the air, was doing a more daring thing than Renfrew felt he could have done himself. And with that he turned his little machine about into the wind, and, finding the field close beneath his nose, sideslipped for his landing.

It was during that side slip that he noticed what no man could ever have noticed from the air unless he had thrown his machine on its side in a certain spot at the precise minute that a sinking sun picked out like a spark of fire some bright object upon the person of a man who was hidden in the copse over which Renfrew flew in landing.

At the moment Renfrew caught that glimpse of the sunset light upon bright metal, however, he was close to the ground, and sideslipping; by the time he had realized that it betrayed the presence of some human being to witness their secret landing, it was too late for

him to change his maneuver. So he landed, and as he landed, Bloom's head popped up from the hole behind the cockpit, and Bloom himself threw one leg over the side of the fuselage.

"Wait!" yelled Renfrew, as he grabbed the man's arm. "There's some one in those woods! They'll see you!"

Bloom's face turned dark with anger.

"They will see a German officer alight from a German plane," he snapped. "Mind your own business. Do what you are told; no more. Meet me here at five on Thursday morning."

Renfrew gazed at him for a moment in surprise. The man had spoken as an irascible officer might speak to an insolent private in the ranks.

"Now go!" said Bloom suddenly.

"Delighted!" said Renfrew sweetly. "Give my regards to the Kaiser." And, still simmering with rage, he roared into the air again. But he did not fly immediately home. He first circled the field upon which he had left Captain Bloom, and examined closely the copse which had attracted him. He noted with a trained, and exceedingly keen eye, every mark and movement of the woods around that field, and he quite ignored the frantic signals to depart which Bloom waved at him from the middle of the yellow expanse of grass.

"The man's a reckless fool," thought Renfrew, as he droned homeward through an empty sky. "He depends too much on that German uniform, if he thinks

that he can stand in the middle of a field and signal to a single seater which he has just proved can carry two people, while a select group of German citizens stand and look at him."

And he had other things to think about as he flew home. Things to which his mind was led by a train of thought which started at the memory of Bloom, waving his arms in the middle of that field, and which moved on to the various peculiarities of that clever spy, and the conditions under which he worked.

CHAPTER XVII

RENFREW KEEPS HIS RENDEZVOUS

HIS new duties left Renfrew a great deal of leisure. The little airdrome where he kept his Pfaltz was a lone place, giving him for company a small group of quiet, friendly officers who were occupied upon duties as secret as his own. So having two days of nothing to do before he need fly back again to that field behind the German lines, Renfrew made use of his newly acquired privileges as a liaison officer with the Intelligence Office, and went up to the front lines to visit a certain sector where Deming, West, Holton, and other old time comrades of the Mounted Police were serving with the Canadians.

They greeted him gladly, and West, who was now lieutenant colonel commanding a battalion, sent orderlies up and down the trenches mobilizing officers of all ranks who had served with Renfrew in the Police. Then, a company all to themselves, they made an informal inspection of the line. They passed through the lines of men, who, having wrestled with death in company of these officers, arose from their muddy places of reclinement and gave them a salute which was a comrade's greeting. They saw and discussed with them the myriad devices whereby men who lived

month after month in mud with death and mutilation for a constant prospect, made life tolerable with comforts which an explorer in the wilderness could not have endured.

They peeped into dugouts, more vile than the subcellars of the vilest slum, where men crowded together in the highest luxury of trench life. And they peered ever and anon into less crowded but hardly more comfortable dugouts which Renfrew's fellow officers proudly claimed as their own quarters.

"Good thing there's not a strafe going forward," said Deming, as he scanned his own muddy nest over Renfrew's shoulder. "When Fritz starts throwing things over, the mud caves in from the walls. It gets quite juicy."

But Renfrew was staring at a face which peered at him from within the dugout. A face with a long, heavy jaw, and eyes of an impossible blue. He spoke finally with a laugh.

"Still," he said, turning away. "You'd be fairly snug, with all those sandbags."

"Oh, yes, snug enough as long as the blood doesn't start splashing about. Heyward's roommate came in with the side of his dugout in the last strafe we had, and it made the position quite untenable."

"And now that we're out of sight and hearing," said Renfrew. "Who was that blue-eyed visitor I seemed to spot in your diggings?"

"Man named Bowen," said Deming. "Why?"

"Seemed to me he had on the tunic of a major in a

guard battalion. Seemed out of place among all these men from Canada."

"He's just visiting, like you are. Came over with some French liaison officers last night, and stopped to visit awhile. Queer cuss."

Which, you will grant, gave Renfrew something to think about. How was it that Bloom—for certainly this Major Bowen was none other than the air-shy secret agent—how was it that Bloom, whom Renfrew was to fetch from Germany at dawn on Thursday, was sitting on Wednesday afternoon in a Canadian dug-out? And why had the man been so easily scared in the air, and yet so recklessly foolish on the ground? Why had he seemed so cocksure that whoever had seen them land in Germany would not investigate his landing? And what had it been that glittered in the sunset among those concealing trees beside the field which Bloom had chosen to land on? Renfrew's train of thought was well on its way to a terminal.

The rules of warfare, however, do not include by-laws which provide for a captain's revising the orders of his superiors. Renfrew had been ordered by Colonel Talbot to coöperate with Bloom; he had not been asked to investigate Bloom's movements, or shape his own upon such investigation. It was his job to be at that chosen field at dawn.

"If I am not there, do not wait for me," Bloom had said. And it was none of Renfrew's business if the secret movements of a spy caused him to change his

plans at the last moment. Renfrew would fly forth at dawn, and keep his rendezvous.

He was up at dawn, speeding over the lines through the icy air. The morning was dim and cloud burdened, so that there were not many other planes up. He passed above a patrolling flight of Spads, and saw a group of enemy D.7's speed away from that patrol even as he passed them. But that was all. Once he sighted a German two-seater, and hesitated to turn his back upon it lest it fight him, but it seemed oblivious of his presence, and circled off into the west. Then he was over the long, yellow field of his rendezvous, and began to glide down for his landing.

As he swept downward, he scanned the earth around that field, and he came into it, as he had come in before, sideslipping with the thought that he might again catch that glimpse of some one watching. But the morning was dim, and although Renfrew had vividly in his mind that glint of red sunlight on metal, he did not see it again. But he sensed that the copse of trees had eyes which saw him. He sensed that, and it filled him with foreboding. Somehow that yellow field had the somber aspect in that dim morning of a field where death might lurk. But he had his rendezvous to keep, and he kept it.

He landed close to the eastern edge of the field, and looked at his wrist watch. It was just five o'clock. With his prop ticking over, and his hand upon the throttle, he waited. Nothing stirred in the deathly stillness of the morning. Even the bare, thickly

twigged forms of the trees and hedges did not move, for there was no wind stirring.

He tried to plumb the dark, black thickets which surrounded the field, but saw no sign of Bloom. Still, he waited. The man might be pressed for time. There would be time enough for him to leave the ground when any human being appeared to detect him. He sat still in his cockpit, with eyes and ears alert. He sat for some moments; and then a little sound aroused him. It was the sound of a man coughing, and it proceeded from that copse of trees at the east end of the field.

Renfrew's hand tightened on the throttle, but even then, he paused. For that cough might come from Bloom as he approached the field of his rendezvous. Renfrew scanned the sinister little bunch of crowded trees, but Bloom did not come out. Then, like a light, the words of Talbot blazed in Renfrew's mind.

"Bloom got back . . . but the flyers have not been so lucky!"

And he pressed his throttle slowly forward, to rush down the field for his take-off. For he knew now what that metallic glint had been. It had been the sunlight, striking the barrel of a machine gun. And Bloom had known it was there!

He roared down the field, and thought quickly as he swept along. The guns would fire as soon as he arose above the tree tops, and he had small room to trick them. Still, it could be done, and he tried it.

He held the machine down to the ground long after

it had acquired flying speed. He held it down until within three feet of the hedge which rimmed the field's western boundary. Then he lifted it over that hedge, dipped for greater speed, threw his machine over on its side, and swooped upward in a right angular climbing turn, which defied gravity and disaster.

It worked, and just in time, for, as he lifted the machine over the hedge the machine guns, sighted to cover his ascent, rattled forth their charge, and missed cleanly their target which was swept by the pilot's skill out of the gunner's sight.

Still climbing, in great zooms which took him straight upward, and climbing spirals which took him out of his zooms, Renfrew soared up over the machine gun nest, then, throwing his nose downward in a stalling turn which risked a spin, he dived vertically upon that copse of trees and let it have the contents of his gun. Three times he did this, and then, aiming at the west, he flew, straight as a die for home.

To his infinite relief, the machine guns did not speak again. Grimly, he decided that his fire had silenced them, but he had not thought so before he saw another result of his attack on the nest. From the space below him to right and left, a number of planes were rising. And he saw the trap at once. These were D.7 Fokker machines, the most deadly scouts which the war produced. They could fly circles about the Pfaltz which Renfrew flew, and he knew that they could climb farther and faster than he could. Obviously he must fight his way home, or, like the other machines which

had coöperated with the wily Bloom, fail to return at all. So he turned and fought.

He whipped his machine about while the Fokkers were still below him, and he brought down his first man with his first burst of fire. Then he turned like a whippet upon the next, and brought him down, crippled, by dint of getting him in his deflection sight. To his joy the others—there were six more of them—veered away.

He chased them, not wishing to be followed, and they, who had not reckoned upon meeting a champion of aërial combat, for the men who ferried spies were not as a rule taken off the work of deadly fighting, sped quickly into the east. Thus he got his guns upon them straight, and saw another one drift downward, before he turned to ply his journey homeward.

He flew straight as he could for a southern sector of the line, because he had no desire that Bloom, who would be watching, should see him safely land. Bloom must think that he had fallen into the trap which was laid for any flyer who should discover that Bloom achieved security in a war in which he had to fight by letting both sides think he was their spy.

But Renfrew's return was not easily achieved. Twelve minutes after he had shaken off the Fokkers, he ran into the two-seater which he had passed in his journey east. A single scout is no match for a two-seater unless it can keep in the enemy's blind spot. And the German two-seater which Renfrew met had no blind spot. Its gunner could fire over the wings

and through the floor of his cockpit, while the pilot had guns as mobile as those of a Pfaltz. Also, this two-seater immediately showed that it was lying in wait for Renfrew by sailing forward to attack him.

With a series of rolls, and loops and spins, Renfrew avoided the double fire, but he could not get into position for his own returning shot, and the two-seater skillfully kept between him and the lines. For ten minutes the unequal contest lasted; the two-seater attacking Renfrew with bursts of fire that Renfrew's skill invariably frustrated, and Renfrew striving to get a fair shot at his enemy by surprising the gunner before he could switch his gun to a new attack.

The end came when Renfrew, having circled away to the right of the side from which the gunner had been firing, looped swiftly, and came down with the two-seater sweeping across his bows. With that lightning calculation of speed, direction, and drift, which is the trait wherein the aërial fighter differs from the mere flyer, Renfrew sighted his gun and pulled his trigger.

His shot killed the pilot instantly, and the two-seater veered into its last dive with the gunner gallantly blazing away at the enemy he had lost. And with that the D.7's which Renfrew had chased away came back to the fight with six more D.7's flown by German pilots who were not loath to engage the finest of the Allied airmen.

Things looked slim for Renfrew then, and he, realizing his predicament, threw his Pfaltz into a vertical

dive, and prayed that his wings would not collapse. He shot like a bomb toward the earth, and did not try to come out of his suicidal dive until he had long passed the velocity which he knew was safe. He must have traveled at nearly two hundred miles an hour for the instant before he pulled her out of it, and in that manner he made it impossible for the enemy to hit him until he had attained a level where they would not soon overtake him. Then it was his part to duck backward, passing under them, and fly off at a right angle, so that before they found him he would be well away.

But when he came out of that mad dive, he ripped a great strip of fabric from one wing, and at the same time he heard the crack which warned him that he could never keep his Pfaltz in the air at the full speed of his engine. As it was, one wing drooped heavily, and he might feel lucky if he landed without disaster. He dared not turn quickly, and he could not hold her nose up. He could only limp home; and here were a dozen Fokkers diving on him.

Gritting his teeth against the moment when he would hear the sound of their guns, he flew forward with nose low, and throttle down. But when the guns broke forth, they were not German guns. They were the guns of a dozen Spads who still patrolled the lines.

CHAPTER XVIII

BLOOM ESCAPES THE FIRING SQUAD

RENFREW left his allies to fight it out with the enemy they had engaged and, using his machine delicately, he drifted gradually down the lines. He landed on the right side of a sector occupied by the French, and he saw his machine break up in the landing as he received a blow from the butt of his machine gun which dazed him. He scrambled out of the wreckage, and found himself the object of a determined little group of *poilus* who made toward him under the leadership of a young officer with their rifles aimed at his breast and in their eyes that alert gravity with which men regard an armed enemy whom they are about to make their prisoner. Renfrew snapped his arms above his head with what lightning speed four 30.30 rifles leveled at one's breast can magically inspire.

"I am an Englishman!" he cried in a species of French which proved it.

"Ah, Eengleesh!" smiled the officer, in what he believed to be a perfect London accent. "You are the Eengleeshman who likes to fly een de Bosche airsheep, hein? *Attendez, mes enfants!*" He chuckled, but there was no mirth in the voice with which he com-

manded his men to keep Renfrew carefully covered, and the sight of Renfrew's British uniform under his flying coat only served to increase the contemptuous severity which he felt toward what was obviously a German spy. Renfrew endeavored to explain in his labored French, but the young Frenchman silenced him.

"Do not speak with that bee-ootifool Paris accent, friend Bosche," he cried sarcastically. "You make me home-seek!" And he laughed his nervous little laugh again.

"If I am a spy, then hand me over to the Intelligence!" cried Renfrew desperately, for too often spies captured in the trenches were never delivered to the authorities. "They will be glad to read my papers!"

Lieutenant Neuville regarded him at that with renewed amusement.

"As for that," he said. "We can to the Intelligence Division of your own army deliver you. Colonel Talbot of the British Intelligence is visiting to-day our lines."

Whereupon Renfrew breathed again. They took him in durance vile to Colonel Talbot, who sat in the mud of a dugout with all the spotless elegance which had characterized his appearance at Headquarters. Like a transition of the Arabian nights, Renfrew was immediately relieved of his captivity, and elevated to the position of a hero incarnate by the warm reaction of the ardent Frenchmen who heard his tale.

"Bloom is acting for Germany!" Renfrew explained. "And he's using our method of transporting our spies by plane to trap all the British machines he can."

Talbot, who listened to his story as though he were listening to a report on the sardine market in the lower Balkans, arose as Renfrew finished, and strode from the dugout with an astonishing aptitude for keeping his boots unsplashed by the mud.

"We'll hop a car and make the salient for luncheon," he said pleasantly as he passed from the dugout; whereby Renfrew gathered that he was to accompany the imperturbable Officer of Intelligence.

Colonel Talbot remained imperturbable while the staff car in which they traveled dodged the heterogeneous traffic of the communication roadways and spurned the edges of shell craters at fifty miles an hour. They reached the pitiable magnificence of Ypres' ruins before the sun was at its heights, and Talbot led Renfrew in an extraordinary game of follow the leader through communication trenches and duckboard pathways which he pursued at a high speed without ever seeming to receive a splash or fleck of the mud which stained Renfrew to the thighs.

They plunged into the Canadian trenches at noon, and strode into the dugout headquarters of Lieutenant Colonel West as though dropping in for luncheon.

"Thanks extremely," said Talbot pleasantly, in acceptance of West's invitation. "We'd both like to, but we've come on business. Is Major Bowen of the Guards still with you?"

"I believe so," said West.

"Then have him arrested," said Talbot. "He's a spy."

West arose to the situation without hesitation.

"Sergeant!" he snapped, and on the man's appearing, "Find Major Bowen and place him immediately under arrest. He's a spy."

"I'll go, too," said Renfrew. And Talbot courteously drew aside to permit Renfrew to leave the dugout first before he followed him, for the colonel, it seemed, was going, too.

They found Bowen's dugout, but the major wasn't in it.

"He's out in shell hole, making sketches," explained an officer who was the absent major's host. "He's an odd one."

Talbot sighed.

"It will be frightfully grubby," he said. But when Renfrew and the sergeant crawled over the top, Talbot was close behind them. They discovered Bloom in the shell hole engaged in the occupation of donning a German uniform.

"Sorry," said Talbot, with a pistol in his hand. "But we came to take you back."

Bloom swore a German oath, glaring at Renfrew.

"You were to fly back to get me this morning," he cried despairingly.

"I did," said Renfrew. "All I got was evidence."

"Well, you won't use it!" cried Bloom, chalk-white. And he sprang to his feet, waving his arms. They

pulled him down, and began to drag him back toward the trenches. They did it on their stomachs, dragging the man behind them, and it was as well they dragged him. If they had pressed him before them, it is probable that Renfrew, Talbot or the sergeant would have received the machine gun fire which Bloom had called upon the Germans to deliver. As it was that fire saved the British as many rounds of ammunition as would have been used by a firing squad on a winter's morning.

The Canadians returned the fire with sufficient accuracy to silence it, but when the sergeant tumbled into the trenches the man they had gone forth to arrest —was very dead.

CHAPTER XIX

GUN-SHY

WHEN Lieutenant Mathew Burnett reported to Squadron Forty-nine, flying S.E.'s out of Cassels, he came with a good reputation as a skilled and daring flyer. That is all his C.O. at Ayre could say for him, because Lieutenant Mathew Burnett, having been in short trousers when the war began, had only just reached the earliest possible age of enlistment, and he knew nothing more of the war than he had learned in the training squadrons or read in the daily papers.

Major Renfrew, commanding Forty-nine Squadron found the new pilot to be a tall, dark lad, with a thatch of curly brown hair, and a blunt, honest countenance. He seemed to be one of the best, and further lived up to that reputation by ascending for his demonstration flight and carrying out the instructions which Renfrew gave him to the letter. This was unusual, for there was not one newcomer out of a hundred who did not take advantage of that demonstration flight to show off all his stunts whether the maneuvers necessary to accomplish them were in the instructions or not. The officers of Squadron Forty-nine, impressed by the youngster's common sense and modesty, immediately took Burnett into their midst and called him "Curly," for short.

Two days later Curly went up on his first patrol with C Flight, under command of Major Renfrew himself, and, on the patrol being engaged by twelve Fokker D.7's, was shot down with a shattered radiator, to land directly behind a sector of the trenches which were being shelled preparatory to a German push. In this manner Curly saw a great deal of the war in full blast, and he returned to the airdrome about ten thousand years older than he had been when he left the ground in the morning.

The following afternoon Curly soared aloft on an offensive patrol with eleven other machines which ran into a dog fight some seventeen miles over the lines. At the first exchange of shots Curly left the fight to come home with a machine gun jam which could not be discovered or explained by the mechanics who overhauled his machine. Whereupon it went forth among the pilots of Forty-nine Squadron, R.F.C., that Lieutenant Mathew Burnett was gun-shy.

Renfrew, having received the report of the flight sergeant as to the condition of Curly's gun that afternoon, had a chat with his new pilot after supper.

"When your machine gun jams in a dog fight," he said, "don't give up the game—the other fellows may need you. Just bank at ninety degrees and fly circles until you can free your gun."

Burnett looked at him for a moment, as though trying to read the thought behind Renfrew's words; then he dropped his eyes.

"I couldn't get it working," he said.

"Better spend to-morrow morning on the range," said Renfrew coldly. He was mentally comparing the low voice with which Burnett had spoken, and the averted eyes of the youngster, with the firm voice and clear, honest gaze with which Burnett had first met his new commander. "Practice your stoppages and jams until you know them; and don't go up again until you can change your lock without coming out of a vertical spiral." With which he walked away.

In the morning Burnett demonstrated on the machine gun range what he could have told Renfrew, and what Renfrew would have believed, the night before; that he was so proficient in the handling of a machine gun that he could have not merely changed the lock of his gun or remedied a jam while circling at an angle of ninety degrees, but that he could have done the trick in total darkness in an inconsiderable number of seconds. It was no more than any man could have done who really profited by his training at the gunnery school.

That afternoon Burnett went up in a two-seater with Renfrew, and demonstrated while diving and firing at a target on the ground, that he could do these things.

"And now," said Renfrew as the two of them climbed out of the machine, "don't let us have any more withdrawals from combat on account of gun jams. It has an ugly sound."

Burnett watched Renfrew as he strode away between the hangars, with a wistfulness that bespoke the troubled thoughts which he would have liked to convey in

words to his commander. Then he became conscious that a group of officers and men was watching him curiously as he stood there, and, abruptly, he swung about and made for his quarters.

He went out with six patrols after that without being once called upon to show his mettle, and then, on a day in late August, he was sent forth with Gunnyng and M'Canlon to escort a reconnaissance machine across the lines.

Renfrew was out that morning on a scouting expedition. He had with him three machines of his squadron, and scurried about the blue skies of Flanders, seeking combat. He had not found it, and was returning to the airdrome when, some five miles over the lines, he observed a British reconnaissance machine doing its stately duty with three S.E.'s circling about above it. Recognizing the machines at once as planes of his own squadron, Renfrew, like a good commander, examined keenly their position and the sky around them from the point of view of how best they might be attacked.

This point of view led his eye immediately into the sun, and to the little fluffy clouds which hung, like masses of raw cotton, to the south. He was in time to see the delicate, almost ghostly forms of a number of Fokkers as they turned and circled up in that high place, and he immediately signaled his companions to follow, as he dipped, zoomed and swerved to reach the same altitude as those lurking enemies, and at the same time place himself between them and the sun.

He achieved this without being seen by the Germans, who were eight in number, because the Germans were obviously intent upon the movement of the two-seater and its three guardians below them. As Renfrew flew, with his throttle wide open and his nose slightly below horizontal, to come up with them, they apparently conceived that the moment for action had arrived, and, scattering into a fanwise formation, they dipped their noses and dived upon their prey.

Immediately, Renfrew fired a burst of his machine gun to warn M'Canlon and his comrades below; then he circled for a moment with his three companions behind him so that he would be at an advantage of height when the time came for him to enter the lists. M'Canlon, hearing the gun fire, glanced upward, and saw his danger. Immediately he gave his signal to Burnett and Gunnyng, and they went into vertical banks to get their bearings. Their position was a bad one, for they had to protect a two-seater, and the enemy, outnumbering them more than two to one, was able to dive in a straight line upon them. M'Canlon, brave as a lion, broke his spiral to leap out and upward, as they bore down on him, twist his machine to the right, and half roll to bring his guns upon them from the flank.

Gunnyng, equally brave, but less dashing, circled away to a point which commanded the two-seater, so that the enemy could not fire upon the observation machine without crossing his fire.

M'Canlon's strategy was based upon disconcerting

the enemy by sheer audacity—a trick used largely by the Flying Corps—and it worked. They swung away from him as he turned his guns on them and their formation lost its effective fan shape, to become a huddle in which one man's machine obscured his neighbor's aim. This crowded them toward Gunnyng, whose fire raked the entire formation and brought down one in flames and another with his engine dead.

The German rush swept by, its dive made ineffective by the clever strategy of the two veteran companions of the air, and, as the Fokkers circled back to try again, Renfrew and his three men came down from the clouds with guns blazing, and engines roaring. The six remaining Germans thereupon decided that the two-seater could reconnoiter to its heart's content as far as they were concerned, and they, for their part, went home.

It was then that Gunnyng and M'Canlon discovered what Renfrew had seen from the upper reaches of the air. They discovered that, as the eight Fokkers had executed that deadly, fanwise dive, Curly Burnett had swung out of his wide circles into a straight line which led to Cassels, and to home. He reported that his engine was missing badly in the midst of the fight; which was an unfortunate report since an overhauling revealed his engine to be in perfect condition, and since Renfrew, unknown to Burnett, had occupied a gallery seat at the drama, and had seen Curly's exit before the first clash had well begun.

CHAPTER XX

WHAT MEN FIGHT FOR

RENFREW paid no attention to the matter until the following morning; then he had Burnett into his quarters; and every officer and mechanic who saw Curly go to that meeting, followed him with eyes full of pity which contained no sympathy. Men who know what fear is do not forgive the man who surrenders to it.

"He'll get a court-martial, and ground duty for duration," said Squadron Forty-nine. "And it jolly well serves him right."

But Renfrew didn't speak of court-martial when Burnett came to his quarters. He sat Lieutenant Mathew Burnett down in the only comfortable chair in the establishment and came to the point immediately.

"Did you leave that scrap yesterday afternoon because you were frightened?" he asked, which was proved to be the best method of opening the matter by the fact that Burnett could answer such a question with a clear voice and steady eyes.

"Yes," he said. "I was."

"Then," said Renfrew, "I imagine you'd like me to get you a safer job. Something on the ground and behind the lines, eh?"

Burnett scowled.

"No," he said. "You're making the same mistake as the rest. It's not dying I'm afraid of. It's not that. It's the war. Lord, Major, I only wish when I feel like that, that some one's bullet would get me. Drop me. Put me out of the war for good. It's not dying I'm afraid of."

"What is it then? What do you mean by 'the war'?"

"I mean the way it has of turning men into things. When I was a kid—why, two years ago, while the war was going on—we used to play games of war. And the thrill you got out of the game was always seeing something blown up, torn down, swept away. Violently destroyed. . . ." He stopped.

"Go on," said Renfrew.

"Well, when I got out here, and saw what they did at the front; saw our fellows blown up as if they'd been so many rag dolls; when I saw the Archie bursts come up to smash men to pieces in the air, why, it wasn't until then that I realized what war was. It's not *things* we're destroying and blowing to pieces—it's men!" He was up out of his chair, pacing the room, a picture of manhood, overwrought.

"Sit down," said Renfrew. Then, when the youngster was seated, "I know what you mean. Supposing I tell you that I have felt just the same way about this war. I have. I have felt, even while I've been doing my best to hold my own against the other fellow, just what you have felt. I've wished sometimes that a bullet might get me that would put me out of the mess

for duration. It's fear, that's what it is; it's fear of the whole ungodly mess that we've got into."

It was Renfrew who did the pacing now. He strode rhythmically up and down the little room, turning upon Burnett ever and anon to point his periods.

"A man has to remind himself when he feels like that, what it is he's fighting for. And so I have reminded myself. I'm not fighting because it's the thing to do, and other men are contemptuous of the fellow who hangs back. I should be ashamed to fight for that. I am fighting because I believe that the spirit of the men who lead the enemy is an evil spirit. It must be crushed, or it will crush us, who believe in honor, and human decency, and man's love for his fellow man. No matter how many may sit on the side lines as conscientious objectors, that cause must be fought out! Now, can you stand the sickening strain of the front line battle, where men are reduced to things, or will you sit in some calm place where you can think upon the horrors of war, and weep, because war is a fact?"

He stood thoughtfully confronting the younger man, and looked very tired as he stood there in his khaki.

"I can only choose one way, myself," he said. "I can understand the idealist who would let one side do all the killing; but I—I can only fight."

"But you are talking of things you have thought out," said Burnett, slowly. "I am talking of something that's a feeling."

"You must choose," said Renfrew.

"Well," said Burnett, "I want to fight. That's why I'm in it. I could never sit on the side lines."

Renfrew regarded him closely. He studied the blunt, honest countenance of the young man, his clear eyes, and the firm line of his mouth.

"All right," he said at last. "Then you and I will go out together this afternoon, and take our chances over the lines. If we fall in with Fritz, you will be able to decide before you return whether you want to fight or not. That's all."

For a moment Burnett stood and gazed into Renfrew's face. He was judging his commander just as his commander had, a moment before, been judging him.

"Now!" he cried abruptly. "Let us go now! I can't keep this in my mind all afternoon!"

"Right-o," said Renfrew. "Let's have the buses out."

CHAPTER XXI

BURNETT DEALS WITH DEATH

TWENTY-FIVE minutes later two S.E.5's were skimming the air over the ridges of Passchendaele. They had met with a little group of five German planes over the lines, but Renfrew, as though he had taken from the manual of the Mounted Police a principle that had become a part of his character, never opened an attack. He always waited for the enemy to fire first, and since the three Germans showed no other desire than that of getting back to their airdrome as soon as possible, he had let them go unmolested. But as they passed over the little ridges beyond Ypres, a German two-seater appeared and audaciously attacked them.

Burnett, who had received detailed instructions from Renfrew, went immediately into circling watchfulness, while Renfrew separated from him to do likewise. As the two-seater approached, it tilted its nose upward, and the gunner in the rear cockpit opened up upon Renfrew through the floor. But Renfrew, moving at one hundred and ten miles an hour came out of his spirals with surprising suddenness, zoomed, and threw himself around in a stalling turn, to come about on the German's tail. The German gunner thus had quickly

to change the direction of his fire, and he was further thrown out by the fact that his pilot, bent on getting Burnett, since Renfrew had been missed, changed his course abruptly.

Curly Burnett, seeing Renfrew's deft turning of the tables, swept across the nose of the two-seater, half rolled, and fell in beside Renfrew just as his commander blazed away. The two-seater, however, zoomed, did a stalling turn, and neatly herded the two British scouts around into the face of twelve German scouts for whom the two-seater was acting as decoy.

Renfrew summed up his position at once. The Germans were above him, and had him directly in a line with their machine guns which would open fire in another second. Burnett was to the right of the two-seater and behind it. At the same time as he took in these conditions and dealt with them in his mind, he realized that he was faced by a flight of Richthoffen's own circus, and recognized the scarlet plane of that greatest of German airmen.

With a glance at Burnett, he threw his machine into a steep dive in that split second before the German fire opened, pulled her out of it at the very slimmest margin of safety, and turned into a steep bank, to circle while he awaited Richthoffen's move. Anxiously he looked for Burnett, and saw him well to the north, following his commander's lead. Then he saw the scarlet plane swoop down; and it swooped toward Burnett.

Now the world knows that Richthoffen was a flying

death to any but the finest of the air force, and to a novice he was a sealed and certain doom. Renfrew, realizing Curly's predicament, turned from his course, to invite the fire of all Richthoffen's followers by jumping on their leader's tail. He made a wide curve which was the reverse of that curve with which the scarlet machine swept down upon its victim, and got the German pilot across his guns for one slim fraction of a second. In that instant he fired, and as he fired a hail of bullets rained upon him from above and behind. Richthoffen's circus always worked in concert.

Almost automatically, Renfrew spun out of the smoking line which the tracers made, and zigzagged to get between the Germans and their leader. At the same time he noticed that his attack had achieved its purpose. Richthoffen, as though amazed at the audacity of a man who would attack him while he gathered in his prey, turned from his pursuit of Burnett to get Renfrew's machine instead. And Renfrew found himself trapped in that deadly circle of flyers who seldom made an error in the team work to which their intrepid leader had trained them.

The Germans, for their part, however, were at the disadvantage of not knowing what manner of man they had among them. Sure of their victory, they ignored him for a moment, while they calmly and beautifully soared about in an amazingly intricate evolution which was to bring them into the deadly fan formation. But Renfrew knew to what end that evolution was designed; which means that he knew beforehand

the course which each plane would pursue, and therefore could estimate fairly accurately the deflection involved in the sighting of his guns. He twisted about in a series of broken curves to left and right, almost rolling his way in and out as he skirted the outside of that curving, soaring pageant of winged monsters. And as he moved he fired, with the result that three German planes dropped from that maneuver before ever the formation was achieved, and Richthoffen himself sailed in to deal with the man who had dealt that extraordinary punishment.

Burnett, meanwhile had fallen far to the westward, and found himself almost automatically headed for home. He had thought that this fight was hopeless—had taken it for granted that two men could not fight twelve, and had expected to find Renfrew at his tail. But as he heard the rattle of Renfrew's machine guns behind him, he turned, and was in time to see the scarlet plane dive forth from the whirling, stunting skyful of planes to engage that spot which sailed, a somber green, among the brilliant enemy.

The scarlet plane wasted no time in feinting. He made for Renfrew obliquely, and Renfrew and he had to judge which way the other would dodge as they approached. Burnett saw the green plane, as it neared the scarlet, twist quickly to the left, and then, like lightning to the right again. That was to bring him about on Richthoffen's tail; but the German had caught his opponent's purpose at Renfrew's first move, and with extraordinary daring he half rolled, risking a

collision, to bring his guns on the other. Renfrew was too close to him when that half roll was completed to do anything but turn to avoid collision. He turned to the left.

Like a shot Richthoffen was upon his trail, and Burnett heard the rattle of his gun as he got Renfrew in his sight . . . and then Renfrew went down. Burnett saw the dull green plane go down. Down in a steep dive, until, far below, it fell upon its side, stalled, and plunged, spinning, into the sea of clouds which hid the earth from view.

Burnett sat in his plane and stared at the mists into which his commander had plunged, without the ability to think or act. He was frozen with horror and with remorse. Then he saw that he was speeding directly into that skyful of German planes which still moved in a maze of varying circles. At once the old fear clutched him again, and he was all but veering about to run away when he saw that three of the enemy were dropping in a dive which aimed at the point where Renfrew had disappeared. They were following Renfrew down!

It was then that Curly Burnett entered his first real combat. He swooped down in a wide curve at the three planes which pursued that steep pathway down the sky, and he yanked up his pressure handle, pressed his trigger, and let the first of them have it as he caught the tip of its yellow wing in the edge of his deflection sight. The plane fairly bounced out of its dive and whipped its nose toward him, while the other two

snapped around in a sudden, suicidal turn. Burnett saw the wings crumple from one of those machines at the same time as, out of the tail of his eye, he saw the scarlet leader of the enemy bringing his five followers down to annihilate him.

But Renfrew was shot down, and these were the men who had done it! That was all Burnett had in mind. They had slain his friend and his commander, and the poor fellow welcomed what he should have known meant death—that is, a chance to fight them all. He flew straight at the scarlet leader, at Richthoffen himself, and fired at him while he hung on his prop. Richthoffen veered to avoid a collision which Burnett seemed to invite, and snapped around in a circle which lost him his prey, for Burnett had turned on another, and with inspired vision, had sent him down.

The bullets were rattling like hail through his machine now, but Curly didn't even notice them. He tore into the battle with a determination which ignored his own safety, and would certainly have died as Richthoffen completed his fourth strategic curve, had not two flights of S.E.'s sailed into the fight from the west, and reminded the German leader that he had not sufficient fuel to play the game any longer. He led his men back into the east, snapping back at the British who attempted to follow, as a retreating wolf might snap at pursuing dogs.

Curly, seeing that the fight was over, plunged downward through the clouds and survived the efforts of a dozen machine gunners to get him from the ground,

until he found Renfrew's plane. To his surprise and relief it was standing, uninjured, beside a communication road some yards behind the British supporting lines. He landed beside it, and questioned the men who stood about.

"He's wounded," said an officer, who watched him closely. "You'll find him back at the dressing station, yonder."

And Curly found Renfrew sitting outside the dressing station, his head swathed in bandages, his face deathly pale.

"Lord," cried Curly. "It's good to see you! I thought they'd done you in!"

"Not quite," said Renfrew. "It was a near thing." He gazed at Curly with the same studying gaze which the officer who had directed Curly to the dressing station had leveled upon him; for the youngster seemed to radiate a quality of exaltation.

"You seem very happy," he said.

"I am. It's good to see you alive—and, Lord, Major, that scarlet fellow certainly can scrap. Hope we meet again some day!"

Renfrew stared pop-eyed.

"You didn't fight with him?"

Curly nodded.

"Great glory, kid, that was Richthoffen! Say!" Renfrew's voice arose in his excitement. "Did you bring down those two planes who fell back of the lines after I came down?"

"One of them. The other poor fellow snapped a

wing off on a turn. So that was Richthoffen, eh?" Curly's eyes looked into far distances.

"Are you thinking what a narrow squeak you've had?" asked Renfrew.

"No," said Curly slowly, "I was thinking how good it is, if a man must fight, to do it in the air. There's not much hate up there, is there?"

"Not much," said Renfrew. "You can't hate another fellow who flies."

"And up there a man isn't just a thing, is he? He's a man. With wings on."

"Right," said Renfrew. "He's a man."

"You know, if I had given up the game—if I hadn't come out with you to-day—it would have been hard to go all through my life,—well, there wouldn't have been anything to prove that I wasn't yellow, would there? A fellow has got to be worthy of an enemy like Richthoffen."

Renfrew smiled, so that his face seemed suddenly less tired and less pale.

"That," he said, "is why we went out together. It isn't much good for a man to live if he cannot respect himself, and have the respect of his foes."

"I thought that I'd never be able to live with the others again. I'll be able to stick it out now, though. Even if they do think I'm gun-shy, I shall know better myself, and that's really the most important thing. Don't you think?"

"Sure it is. But look here, young feller, if you think that they'll regard as gun-shy a man who has fought

with Richthoffen, and brought down one of his circus, —well, you're out of your head. When you get back they'll have a band out for you. Now get in your bus and fly home. I'm going to do a faint." Which he promptly did; and inasmuch as Curly didn't fly home until he was assured that Renfrew would pull through all right, he didn't alight on his airdrome until dusk.

The whole squadron greeted him, for the S.E.'s which had come in time to send Richthoffen home had reported the battle they had witnessed, and had reported at the same time that the single plane of Squadron Forty-nine which they had seen engaged had dived for the earth evidently under control.

Of course every one who was reading newspapers during the last years of the war knows that Burnett became afterward the recipient of more honors than any other British airman who survived the war. But he has never been able to remember an ovation which was more welcome or an appreciation which more deeply moved him than the greeting which that evening was given him by the comrades who, in the morning, had condemned him as a coward.

The truth was that Curly Burnett was not able, in all his career, to fight in hatred. In what he had believed was Renfrew's death, he had found a cause. Later, knowing the feel of aërial combat, he could fight, like Renfrew, confident of the cause which had brought him to wear khaki; forgetful of himself, and considerate of his enemies, as men.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE DISCARD

MAJOR RENFREW returned to the front after a five weeks' sojourn in the Flying Corps Hospital on Parliament Hill, but he did not return to fly scouts. They had given him the privilege of choosing between a ground job in whatever portion of the empire he cared to visit, or a job on reconnaissance or bombing work. For three weeks, in short, he was to take things easy, and since he wouldn't take the convalescent leave which was offered him, he must occupy himself with something less arduous than fighting duels in the upper reaches of the air. He chose reconnaissance work.

"The sensation of being bombed as I have experienced it in five airdromes and three hospitals, does not," he said, "fill one with enthusiasm for dropping bombs on the other fellow as much as you might think it would." So they attached him to a squadron flying 9's out of St. Omer.

It was not often that a two-seater squadron found a commander of the scouts in its mess. The two phases of work developed two extremely different types of men, and it surprised the officers of One-sixty to find Renfrew a man more of the reconnaissance type; a

man who thought and worked with his mind, rather than on his nerve, as so many of the scouts did. Their surprise was probably due to the fact that they saw many scout pilots but few of that class which the French called "aces." An overwrought nervous tension can keep you in the air, and in the battle, but it doesn't make for a long life or a very considerable usefulness. A cool head was ever the scout's most essential piece of equipment.

It somewhat embarrassed Major McQuarrie, who commanded Squadron One-sixty, that this officer, who was his equal in rank and the bearer of a string of ribbons which gave him great distinction, should come into the squadron as a guest on duty, so to speak, and place himself immediately at McQuarrie's disposal. McQuarrie courteously gave Renfrew the opportunity to do what he liked by requesting him to take charge of discipline, a duty which would give him most of his time to himself.

But Renfrew had a new D.H. 9 at his disposal, with an observer named Smythe and called Smitty, and, with this equipment, he had no intention of staying on the ground. So he attended to his disciplinary duties first thing in the morning and last thing in the afternoon, and spent the day taking lessons from Smitty in the gentle art of aërial reconnaissance. In return for this tuition, he worked out with his observer some very pretty strategy designed to make that particular D.H. 9 a machine which could take care of itself.

Four days after he arrived at St. Omer he reported

to Major McQuarrie his readiness to do some reconnaissance work. McQuarrie regarded him with embarrassment.

"Yes," he said. "Of course. But look here, Renfrew, I can't let you go up, you know. I mean that—well, you're supposed to be doing a rest cure."

Renfrew stared at him in consternation.

"You're shooting at the sky, Major," he said crisply. "I'm assigned to this squadron for reconnaissance work, and reconnaissance work I'm going to do. I took the job on because it was explained to me that you fellows worked more or less independently; that you put on few squadron shows, and that therefore I could work with you and at the same time work on my own. Now I want something to do. All you've got to do is to assign me to it."

McQuarrie gazed at him for a moment as though at a loss for words. Then, seizing a letter which lay on the table before him, he tossed it over to Renfrew. "Read that," he said, and Renfrew read it. It was by way of being Wing Orders addressed to McQuarrie and intimately concerning Renfrew.

"You are instructed to regard Major Renfrew, British Columbia Horse, attached Royal Flying Corps," it read, "in the light of a noncombatant officer attached to your squadron for purposes of what ground duties he may find to do. Major Renfrew is regarded highly as a scout pilot, having brought down many enemy planes, and having contributed largely to the high moral efficiency of the Flying Corps on the western

front. He is now recuperating from wounds received in action, and because of his great usefulness as a scout pilot it is desirable that he refrain from active service until he has completely regained his physical effectiveness."

"You see my position," said McQuarrie.

Renfrew grunted his assent.

"It's particularly difficult for me," continued the major, "because the new Fokkers are making it highly dangerous for two-seaters, and they can only spare us Camels for protection. If you got pipped at this work, I'd have a nasty job of explaining to do."

With that the door of the commander's office was flung open and a slight, blond young man with a major's crown on his shoulders strode swiftly into the room. McQuarrie jumped to his feet, with Renfrew after him, and the three majors stood and looked at one another.

"If we had a couple of jacks," said Renfrew pleasantly, "we'd be a full house."

The blond youth ignored him, he was obviously highly excited, and had but one thing on his mind. He proceeded at once to give voice to it.

"They tell me you were over at the drome to see me, McQuarrie," he cried. "I'll bet I can tell what it was about!"

McQuarrie frowned at the floor. Then:

"I wondered whether we couldn't work out some method of coöperation, so that that sort of thing

couldn't happen again," he said. "Major Renfrew, meet Major Kingsley."

Kingsley dismissed the introduction with a nod. He hadn't even heard Renfrew's name.

"I thought so!" he cried. "I suppose you've got my squadron down as gun-shy." He ignored McQuarrie's protesting gesture and swept on. "That's the trouble with all you two-seaters, you can't understand what the scouts are up against. You think Warburton and Eaton ran away yesterday, and you're going to report that as the reason why your precious 9 came down in Germany with all its precious cameras and gadgets. Well, they didn't run away! What happened was this —Warburton told me and I believe him—your two men showed fight when those D.7's came down on them, and expected our fellows to help them. There were six Fokkers, and two Camels, and the Camel hasn't got a chance against a D.7, plane to plane. So our two Camels signaled your fellows to go home, and when your men tried fighting, they led the way. It was that or suicide. A Camel *cannot fight against these new machines!* Not when it's outnumbered, and has two-seaters to protect!" He stopped for lack of further words.

"I know, I know," said McQuarrie at last. "I have no intention whatever of reporting that we received poor protection from you. I only went over to see if we couldn't coöperate. Get together and work out some method of combining two-seater effectiveness

with the mobility of your Camels. Lord, man, I don't want your men to die!"

"But to stand an even chance with a D.7 a Camel's got to have the sky to play in. It can't be tied to a two-seater, it's got to stunt like a sparrow, or it'll go down as sure as shooting. The D.7 can fly circles around us and climb while they do it. We're dead at a ceiling of twelve thousand feet, the D.7 can climb to twenty and loop or roll at eighteen thousand. If you don't want Camel pilots to commit suicide, you tell 'em at Headquarters to give you S.E.'s for protection, or Spads. Otherwise rear-guard protection is the best we can give you, and you'll have to tell your fellows to fly home when the Camels give 'em the signal."

"But why not try McQuarrie's suggestion of co-operation?" asked Renfrew.

Kingsley turned upon him with distraction and despair.

"Lord love us!" he cried. "Why don't they train two-seater pilots on Camels! Can't you believe me when I tell you that a Camel is constitutionally incapable of coöperating in combat with a 9?"

"No," grinned Renfrew, who had won his spurs on Camels over the Ypres salient. "I can't."

"All right then," snapped the youthful major, "don't! But for heaven's sake, McQuarrie, tell your fellows to cut out the fighting. You won't have any Camels, or 9's either, if you keep that up."

"I'll talk it out with you some other time," said McQuarrie.

"Is he right?" queried McQuarrie, as soon as the excited young ace had gone.

"Right and wrong," said Renfrew. "Two Camels cannot protect two 9's from six D.7 Fokkers. It just means annihilation. But if they haven't any more Camels to spare they ought to try coöperation. I've an idea that something might be worked out along those lines."

McQuarrie thought that over in silence for a space.

"Anyway," he said at last, "you see how it is. The work's getting harder every day. It's getting so that the war is positively dangerous. I can't let you go up on our work until I get Wing Orders to that effect."

"All right," sighed Renfrew. "But tell me this much. Who's your best pilot? I mean in the sense of being the most skillful flyer."

"Pembroke," said McQuarrie immediately. "Why?"

"Wanted to have a chat with him," said Renfrew. "I'll look him up over at the hangars." And he strolled from the office very casually.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DOUBLE DECOY

ALL that day and for much of the time when all were free on several other days, Renfrew, Smitty, Pembroke, and Trane, Pembroke's observer, were seen to be much in company. They went aloft to play a peculiar game together in the clouds, and they foregathered in quiet corners of the mess, or in their quarters, where Renfrew drew queer diagrams and spoke strange words.

"It's your blind spots that get you," he would explain. "A 9 has all the blind spots of a scout without the ability to move quickly to cover them. But a 9 has two pairs of eyes, and if they are provided by two crackerjack gunners, I don't see why this double decoy play shouldn't make them more useful than a whole squadron of Camels." That was the sort of thing he would say to them, and, his words being overheard as he spoke them beside the gunnery shack on the range—his words being overheard but not understood—he was called "Double Decoy" Renfrew by the officers of One-sixty.

He is still remembered by that name by all members of that squadron who are still alive, for when he gave them a demonstration of what the queer term meant,

he gave it in a manner which was not quickly forgotten by those who saw it or who heard of it.

Renfrew gave that demonstration four days after his interview with McQuarrie. McQuarrie had not succeeded in gaining any considerable coöperation from Kingsley, nor was Kingsley's suggested solution to the problem which confronted his work a particularly successful one. The German D.7's filled the air, and when the 9's started for home with the Camels doing rear-guard action behind them, it was not often that they won across the lines. Two-seaters and Camels were coming down like flies in that sector, and the major mourned the loss of eight machines, eight pilots and nine observers. He was fighting-mad about it, and the depths of his tragedy lay in the fact that he could not fight.

It was a gorgeous, sunlit day. The sky was blue-white, caressing the earth with a mist of gossamer which did not conceal from the flyer the lovely contours of the countryside, its lines of trees, and grove-sheltered farmhouses, the variegated green carpet, divided by hedge and fence and road and stream into a patch-work quilt of serenest beauty. High in the air woolly masses of clouds floated lazily, and the roar of the engines which bore Major McQuarrie and his observer, and Lieutenant Massee and his observer, up and down the long roadway which it was their lot that day to photograph, was muffled by the sultry air to a sound which, in the still sunlight, resembled, from the ground,

the drone of some gigantic bee. Above the two reconnaissance machines five Camels wheeled and circled.

The photographers were doing their work at an altitude of about four thousand feet. The Camels were five thousand feet above them, and the clouds, thick and woolly as a toy lamb, were four or five thousand feet above the Camels. Captain Flugrath, who led that flight of Camels, watched those clouds closely. The work had not been interrupted yet by fire from the ground, and this in itself worried the captain, for it was not like Archie to let a two-seater calmly gather its photographs without throwing a few shells up to frighten the photographers. It seemed to suggest that Archie expected to see the two-seaters taken care of from the air. And those clouds might have been designed to provide ambush for whatever enemy planes might wish to await the proper time for attack upon two-seaters protected only by Camels. It further worried the captain to observe that the roadway which was being photographed passed directly under those woolly, impenetrable clouds. He eyed them with a wary eye, and with great care looked over his machine gun belt intake, his oil piston, and his Bowden control.

The two-seaters droned on their way at ninety miles an hour, snapping their overlapping photographs, and speeding toward the shadow which the clouds threw on the green surface of the earth. They were directly within that shadow and fifteen miles over the lines when Captain Flugrath saw the enemy appear. Nine D.7 Fokkers dived from those clouds like ghostly skele-

tons of prehistoric birds, and they made an undeviating line for the Camels. Flugrath, knowing his disadvantage (for the enemy planes could pick them off one after another on the dive without the low-powered Clerget engines of the Camels permitting them to meet the destructive fire) gave the burst of fire that was to warn the two-seaters to start home with their precious plates, and then prepared for that rear-guard action which was to give the 9's their start, and which had, on two previous occasions, resulted in the complete annihilation of the Camels engaged upon it.

McQuarrie, white with rage, signaled his companion to fly for it, and swung about to make his own doubtful return. As he did so, four of the Fokkers contemptuously left their five companions to engage the five Camels, and swerved from their dive to attack the two-seaters.

The machine guns started to rattle then, in that perfect midsummer sky, and one of Flugrath's men immediately left the combat to crash, without a prop, in a green field below. McQuarrie's observer accounted for one of the four who attacked the two-seaters, and, disconcerted, the others, whose best bet was to get below the 9's and out of the gunners' sight, stunted down the air to gain that superior position. The Camels tumbled bravely about to meet the Fokkers' fire, but the odds were all against them, for, although they escaped the diving fire which should have all but wiped them out, the ability of the enemy planes to bob up into the air like corks in clear water while the Camels

hovered in their climbing, made the result of the battle certain.

The Camels scattered, like sparrows cowed by a hawk, and, irritated no doubt by the manner in which the British scouts had escaped the first destructive fire, the German leader fired a signal which recalled the three who pursued the two D.H.9's and, eight strong, they evolved their fanwise formation to blow the Camels from the sky. It was at that point in the battle that Flugrath became aware of two D.H.9 machines which, in their grand, majestic manner, calmly sailed between him and the sun, as though they were taking pictures of the battle.

Flugrath swore.

"Why didn't they go home!" he cried to himself. "We're all in the gravy, now!"

But far behind him, the two 9's he had been protecting were wheeling about so that their astonished pilots could see what Flugrath had seen, and what the Fokkers now could see. Two cumbrous machines designed for bombing, calmly flying into a fight between Camels and D.7 Fokkers. Four flying men committing suicide, as McQuarrie, startled out of all comprehension, yelled in vain to his observer. Renfrew and Pembroke had come to take a hand.

The two 9's sailed up to the outskirts of the fray, divided, and swept about that battle as two sloops of war might have ranged the field of a battle between catboats. Immediately from those big planes, Smitty and Lane, two of the most deadly machine gun shots of

the Royal Flying Corps, opened fire on the Fokkers as they maneuvered for room to slay the Camel pilots, and immediately, indignantly, the Fokkers turned their superior climbing power to account by darting like hawks into the blind spots of those two massive, deep-green monsters.

But the two fine gunners were aided by two skilled pilots who had practiced this maneuver time and time again. Both planes banked heavily, and swept toward one another in a wide circle which they crossed and doubled, making a gigantic figure eight. And as they did it, Flugrath, McQuarrie, who was speeding post haste back to the conflict, and several other pilots saw something happen which it had always been presumed could not be done. They saw an observer of a D.H. 9 bring down an enemy scout which had attacked it in its blind spot. The Fokker had come up under Renfrew's machine from beneath where neither pilot nor observer could see him, and yet it had gone down in flames. Almost at the same time two Fokkers which had attacked Pembroke's plane veered away and fell into the fatal dive earthward which carries all good aviators to a better place than earth.

Another German, who had been striving for Renfrew's life, looped like a startled shark, and was caught in the cross fire between Smitty's gun and the gun of Trane, Pembroke's observer. It broke up in the air, descending in pitiful fragments.

"In the name of Immelman, how do they do it?"

cried Captain Flugrath to himself. But McQuarrie had been watching the tracers, and he knew.

"They kept away from each other," McQuarrie explained to Flugrath afterward. "While you watched us, they watched for Huns, and when they sailed in they kept away from each other and each one covered the other's blind spot. See how it works? A scout hasn't got a chance with a two-seater unless he attacks its blind spots, but these chaps drove them out of the blind spots and chased them into the open. That's what they did, and you saw the result. Lord, we won't need protection if we can fly like that and keep together!"

Flugrath had seen what had happened all right. He had seen the Fokkers sweep into the upper air, and had hung on his prop to try and get at one of them, only to see the black belly of a bomber sweep between him and the enemy while Renfrew's forward gun spat flame as he made the 9 describe a circle no 9 was ever meant to make, and shot the life out of that Fokker's engine with a single burst of fire. Then he banked over, with extraordinary sympathy for his observer who had almost given up hope of getting a shot at one which dived for Pembroke's plane, and that German went down with the combined contents of two machine guns in his engine's vital parts. The Camels, meanwhile, scurried about, rounding up the Germans as a shepherd dog rounds up the sheep. The harried Fokkers had to attack the 9's, or fall victims to the Camels upon which the 9's threw them

as the pilots, with beautiful sweeps of curving, set the observer's guns on them.

It was one lone Fokker that flew home, and he only managed it by crippling the Camel that endeavored heroically to bar his way. Then, with the two fighting two-seaters high above them, McQuarrie and his companion finished taking the pictures of that road.

When the little fleet of scouts and two-seaters returned to the airdrome again, McQuarrie discovered with mixed feelings that his savior had been Renfrew and Pembroke.

"It was a little flight of my own," grinned Renfrew. "They couldn't have held you responsible."

"And what do you call that strange method you've got of making a 9 fight a Fokker?" asked McQuarrie.

"That," said Renfrew, "oh, that's the Double Decoy. You see each 9 acts as a decoy for the other. Instead of each one fighting his own little battle, he waits until the enemy dives for his companion's blind spot, as they're sure to do, and then he's got him cold. You tell Kingsley that if he can't coöperate with Camels in a game of that sort, he ought to fly R.E.8's."

But as long as Renfrew was with the squadron the machines of One-sixty never asked for a scout convoy again. They managed to take such good care of themselves that enemy aircraft let them do a great deal of reconnaissance in peace.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LIGHT ON THE DROME

IT took Renfrew the better part of a week and five battles in the air to learn that he was all wrong, and that the doctors had been right. He was not ready for combat duty yet. It took too much out of him. The wounds which had sent him to hospital had lost him too much blood to permit him to regain physical fitness under the strain of aërial warfare. So, desiring usefulness more than anything else, he became the strategic officer for Squadron One-sixty, training the De Haviland planes of that squadron to increased fighting efficiency.

But life became a little dull with only strategic flying instruction to do, and Renfrew became accustomed to a practice in which Flying Corps pilots in France seldom indulged. He flew for pleasure.

One glowing summer's evening he strolled forth after supper with his goggles in his hand, and picked up Smitty at the mess.

"How about going up to see the country?" he suggested. "It's a sweet evening to drone about along the sand dunes."

"Wait till I get my bonnet," said Smitty, who enjoyed as much as Renfrew did a quiet flight in the

evening over places where people lived, children played, and the war apparently did not exist.

They crossed the airdrome together, two trim, fit figures which were handsomely arrayed in the neat tunic of the Flying Corps and the easy "slacks" which every officer was glad to wear when off duty. At the hangars there was a tall, raw-boned flight sergeant on duty, who greeted them with a sullenness barely covered by the respect with which he saluted.

"Run out my bus," said Renfrew. "We're off on a joy ride." But the sergeant turned away without returning Renfrew's smile. "Liver trouble, I guess," said Renfrew.

"That's Applegate. He's under discipline, I believe," said Smitty, "and he takes it badly. Now what?"

The sergeant had emerged from the hangar, and approached them with a twist of the lips that suggested a sort of sour pleasure.

"Sir," he said, saluting, "sorry to say, sir, your machine's out of order. The engine's on the blocks. You won't be able to use it to-night, sir."

"What's wrong? Bus out of commission?" It was Major McQuarrie who had appeared from the rear. "Why don't you take out mine, Renfrew? She's turning over nicely."

"Thanks, Major." Renfrew turned again to the sergeant. "Run out Major—" he paused, puzzled by something in the man's appearance. "Major McQuarrie's bus will do," finished Renfrew.

"Did you chance to notice that fellow's face when I spoke to him?" he asked Smythe, after the man had gone.

"I did," grinned Smythe. "He looked as if you were sending him to war. The man looked scared. Funny, that."

They walked over to the next hangar, from which four mechanics, under the flight sergeant, were rolling out the ponderous 9. Smythe followed Renfrew as he rounded the wing of it and patted with a certain quality of affection the tight green surface of the fabric.

"You beauty," said Renfrew. "Wonder if you're going to let us down to-night." And he was about to climb up to the cockpit, when he stopped and brought his foot back to the earth again. "This isn't Major McQuarrie's bus!" he said.

Flight Sergeant Applegate who had been standing at the nose of the machine regarding its engine with a mechanic's interest, gazed across the wing at Major Renfrew.

"It's Captain Marshall's machine, sir," he said. "He's on leave, and I thought it would be better to use his than the major's who'll be wanting it for service in the morning."

Renfrew studied the sergeant coolly.

"Did you hear what your orders were?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," there was an angry gleam in Applegate's dark eyes, now. "But I thought you'd understand, sir. Shall I wheel out Major McQuarrie's machine, sir?"

"No," said Renfrew, a little ashamed of his severity, in the face of the man's subservience. "This'll do now. But it's generally best to execute orders to the letter, Sergeant Applegate."

"Yes, sir." And in another moment he was superintending the take-off of Major Renfrew, who set forth with a roar to drone peacefully over a quiet, sleepy world of homes, and over a sluggish seashore, misty in the evening, which conjured the war away from tired mind and nerves.

It was dim dusk when they returned to the airdrome, and Renfrew, very happy, flipped the big plane around the hangars and into the wind for his landing, as though it had been light as an Avro and mobile as a Spad. He taxied up to the tarmac and climbed out as the mechanics came forward to roll the machine to its nest.

"Fine, fair evening," he remarked as he studied the violet sky, lit with a multitude of stars. "Good night for a raid."

"And rain in the morning," guessed Smythe. They walked across the airdrome side by side.

Renfrew was gazing at the stars again.

"If there are any nervous individuals at this airdrome to-night," he said, "they'll have every reason to be scared. When Fritz gets to the point of avoiding combat with a squadron that fights too well, he generally goes after them with bombs, and to-night's a sweet night for a bombing raid. Dark and fair."

His prognostication came true. There had been a

good deal of night bombing done by the Germans during the summer, and as a result supper was held in a stuffy mess building, illumined by lanterns, and closed to ventilation by screened windows. All lights were hidden on the airdromes in those nights of the war's last summer. After supper Renfrew, and a few other officers who preferred the fresh air without the solace of tobacco, to their pipes in the stifling atmosphere of the interior, strolled out upon the airdrome. McQuarrie, who never lagged in devotion to his duty, crossed the grassy expanse to his office.

With Smitty, who was an American flyer attached with several others to this squadron, Renfrew found himself walking along the little stream which bounded one side of the airdrome, and discussing differences between the strange world of Europe and the America from which these two officers had come.

"All these European towns are dead!" Smythe had declared. "Why, a lot of the best houses haven't even got plumbing in them!"

"Not dead," Renfrew was saying. "The difference between Amiens and Battle Creek, isn't that Amiens is dead and Battle Creek alive. It is just that Amiens has grown up and Battle Creek is still in the growing stage. It's all to the advantage of Battle Creek in the matter of liveliness, but life in Amiens gives you time for thought. While they look at their medieval cathedral and think about it, we folks at home are putting in our plumbing and hurrying like blazes to work in

the development of something so that we'll have the money to pay for it."

Guns were booming in the distance, but the two officers hardly noticed the sound.

"But why can't they have the plumbing as well?" argued Smythe.

"Because they've got nothing to develop. Everything's been done by their forefathers and there's nothing left for them to do but make a living. So they make a living and take enough time off to appreciate that they're alive. In America there's everything to do, everything to develop; land to reclaim from wilderness, and metals, chemicals and lumber coming out of the land. That gives everybody work to do, and that gives everybody money to spend. They'd hustle over here if they had so much to do, and then they'd spend their money on autos and on plumbing. If you are given an old, beautiful garden to live in, you'll just live in it. If you're given a plot of waste ground with a house on it, you'll never cease working to develop a garden. That's the difference."

"Sure," said Smythe. "I see what you mean. It makes me glad that I belong to America."

At which point the air became filled with a great noise which reverberated from every object on the ground, and seemed to shake the earth. It was the sound of a dozen mighty motors roaring in invisible planes up in the night above them.

"A raid!" cried Renfrew. "That's what the guns were. Archie!"

The invisible raiders droned mightily above them, and the sound of the engines moved in a wide circle.

"They're trying to spot the drome!" whispered Smythe. "I hope they don't know how close they are!"

At the other end of the airdrome, well away from the hangars, a red flash stabbed the blackness of the night, and they saw a black cloud of earth leap up as the roar of the bursting bomb deafened them. Another and another followed. The ground shook terribly beneath their feet, and the bombs ripped up the earth down the length of the airdrome. The two officers threw themselves to the ground and heard the metal sing through the air above them.

There was a pause in the fearful din which gave way to the thunderous hum of the motors. The bombers had evidently sensed from the lack of flame that their bombardment was damaging no buildings. And on the airdrome no door was opened, and no glimmer of light was shown. Above Renfrew and Smythe the roar of the engines veered away and returned as the flyers circled. Then it betrayed a mighty curve which the bombers made across the airdrome, and out of the blackness came little stabs of bright flame and the rattle of machine guns, while another tune was hummed in the black sky.

"Camels!" cried Renfrew, his eyes gleaming. "That's old Kingsley up and at 'em!"

The machine guns rattled away in great chorus for a minute or two and then a bright light filled the sky

well off to the east, and the two watchers saw the awful spectacle of a twin-engined bomber coming down in flames. The drone increased again.

"They're coming back!" cried Smythe. "Wish we'd found a hole in the ground for our conversation."

But the bombers were coming back because they were driven back, for a dozen night-flying scouts were on their trail. They tried twice to turn as they crossed the airdrome of Squadron One-sixty, but twice they were herded around toward the west. And then, as they passed over the extreme end of the drome something occurred. Smythe drew in his breath with an unbelieving cry, and clutched at Renfrew's arm.

"See that?" he cried sharply, as though he had been stabbed with a knife. Renfrew followed his eagerly pointing finger and saw the explosion of a bomb.

This time the bomb struck home. Renfrew saw the little frame building which was McQuarrie's office suddenly illumined by a sheet of flame which showed him the wreckage of that edifice leaping with a mass of earth into the air and falling in a black shower upon a flaming torch that was fed by all of the office that was left. Then bombs dropped in swift sequence. Again and again the air was rent and the earth was shattered by the many hundreds of pounds of high and inflammable explosives which were dropped. A hangar went up in flames, and a petrol dump illumined the whole airdrome with a vast pillar of scarlet fire.

"The machines!" snapped Renfrew, and with Smythe he dashed toward the hangars as did every officer and

most of the men of the squadron. For it looked as though the bombers would certainly destroy all the hangars, and the machines might still be saved. It looked like death, but it was the thing to do.

"Poor Mac," muttered Renfrew as he sped toward the blaze. "He was a good C.O."

"And they got him," rasped Smythe between clenched teeth, "because some swine showed a light!"

Renfrew stopped short in his stride and grabbed his junior's shoulder.

"A light?" he cried. "Smitty! You're mad!"

"Mad enough to kill the dirty spy!" gasped Smitty, almost sobbing in his grief and rage. "That's why I grabbed your arm. Before that bomb fell, I saw some one light a cigarette lighter over near the office! Then he ran for it!"

CHAPTER XXV

RENFREW FINDS A CLEW

RENFREW and Smythe did not reach the hangars, for the night was saved for Squadron One-sixty by the scouts who harried the German bombers with their gun fire. Two more of the Gothas came down, and the rest evaded their attackers at the cost of missing the brightly illumined airdrome beneath them.

But Squadron One-sixty had a fire to fight which for a time menaced their petrol and munition dumps, so officers and men worked in the midst of tons of explosives until almost morning. It was dawn before Renfrew found that while he was commanding a body of fire fighters at the eastern end of the field, the fire fighters at the western end had been under the command of Major McQuarrie, whom Renfrew mourned as dead.

"You weren't there?" he cried as he wrung the commander's hand. And then, remembering. "Mac, that bomber was guided to your quarters by a light shown on the ground."

McQuarrie nodded.

"I know. That's why I wasn't inside when the bomb struck," he said. "I was standing with all lights

out, looking through the window when I saw that light. It was from a cigarette lighter, I should say, and it was carried by a man in an air mechanic's uniform. Of course I bounded through the window like a bloomin' gazelle, and had after the blighter in what was probably the wrong direction. Then the party opened. What'll we do about it? Have the men up on parade and let them beat the fellow out of cover? That often works."

"I wouldn't," said Renfrew. "I've done a good bit of detective work in my time, and I've always found it best to take the most serene attitude possible. Let's do nothing until we find out how many men saw that light. Then we'll act accordingly."

The day was dim with heavy clouds which almost touched the earth, so it was a day of no flying but of immense activity. A painstakingly minute report of the raid was published at noon in all the mess rooms, and all officers and men were requested to report individually if they had any information not mentioned in the report which would help make more complete the record sent to Headquarters. Many highly diverting details were thus obtained from men who had seen the raid through eyes made imaginative by a lively sense of excitement, and two mechanics came in to report that they had seen with their own eyes the light which guided the bombers' aim. These men had spread throughout the squadron this exciting news, and McQuarrie was at loss how to deal with it.

"Let me see 'em," said Renfrew.

He interviewed the men, and found them as honest and intelligent as any two good mechanics would be. So he took them into his confidence.

"We're eternally grateful to you fellows for this information," he told them. "And we believe you're right. We are now out to get the man who did this, and it's among the mechanics we'll find him, for he wore the same uniform as you do. If we let him think that we know too much, though, he will be on his guard, and we don't want that. You fellows can help us. We want you two men to tell the others when you leave here that we laughed at you. That we said your story was a cock-and-bull story, and didn't believe a word of it. Will you do that?"

Delighted to be on the inside of such a mystery, and burning with rage at the known presence of a traitor among them, the two soldiers promised to play the part as ordered, with the result that indignation meetings were held in the men's mess halls against the officers who laughed to scorn the most exciting story of the war. The officers of the squadron gave further cause for indignation by good-humoredly joking the men whenever they heard the subject mentioned. In the midst of so much good acting the two mechanics began to wonder whether they had really seen that treacherous light or not.

"And now," said Renfrew, "let's go over the list of ratings and look for suspects."

McQuarrie, Renfrew, and Stevens, the adjutant, met in the orderly room and scanned the roster of the

squadron thoroughly without finding one who could have been suspected of being in German pay.

"The ugly fact," said Renfrew at last, "is that you were known to be in the hut to which the traitor drew the German fire. Our signaler might have been gunning for you, Mac."

Renfrew's pronouncement had the effect of a bombshell. McQuarrie sat back in his chair and stared at Renfrew with honest gray eyes that reflected hurt and bewilderment. Stevens turned on Renfrew with hot indignation.

"Are you mad?" he cried. "Mac's as good a C.O. as ever issued an order!"

He stood erect, hot with anger at the insult which had been offered his commander. For in the eyes of the overseas officer there was no more shameful fate could overtake a commander than that of being shot in the back by his own men. There was a strong bond of sympathy and understanding between the British officers and men, and the officers sensed, as it were, that a commander could hardly earn the hatred of his men save by abusing his authority, which offense, to rank and file, was an unforgivable crime.

"But there are exceptions," said Renfrew calmly. "The war does queer things to some men, and it's possible that you may have under your command a man so deranged by the war that the most ordinary discipline could incite him to murder. I suggest that we go over the lists of men you have lately disciplined."

"I'm loath to think that you're right, Renfrew,"

said McQuarrie slowly. "But we're up against ugly facts, and—"

He broke off suddenly, and a grim light shone in his eyes.

"Turbott!" he cried.

"Who's he?" demanded Renfrew quickly.

"He's a man I had up for thievery when I commanded Training Squadron Forty-eight at Tern Hill. He had been a burglar by profession, and was a hard case. He took it badly when I sent him to jail, and then I didn't see him again until they sent him here. You see he hasn't had the front line experience which turns criminals into sacrificial followers."

"Where is he now?" asked Renfrew.

"Right at hand. We can have him in, if you like."

"Sorry, Mac, but we can't," said Stevens. "Turbott's away on a three days' leave, and he won't be back till to-morrow."

"Where's he spending it?" demanded Renfrew, hot on the scent.

"Amiens, probably. I know he went in on the Amiens tender when he left, and took a transport pass for that town."

"And he could have come back last night, done his dirty work, and departed, to return innocent as a newborn babe after his leave," speculated Renfrew.

McQuarrie shuddered.

"But I can't believe the man would do it. One of my own men!" he said unhappily.

"Perhaps not," said Renfrew. "We're only specu-

lating, you know. Anyway, we'll put a tracer on Turbott, and have him in for examination when he returns. Now there are the disciplinary lists to look over. Who's been up lately?"

Stevens referred to his records.

"This is alphabetical," he said. "There's Adams; he's a kid who came up for absence without leave. He's all right. Affleck was fined for insubordinate language in making a complaint. He said the soup had been used too often. He's a humorist and is willing to pay for it. Anningdale overstayed his leave, and blushed when I asked him why, so we gave him three days C.B. which he spent writing letters to her. Then there's Applegate. That's a more serious case. He's Flight Sergeant of D Flight and he's been playing tyrant over his men, taking bribes—or blackmail—from them. You know, selling leaves and selling immunity from punishment. It's a dirty game and he knows he'll get little mercy from the major. We had enough evidence over at the office in the way of affidavits from the men to have put him in jail and run him out of the service. Now we'll have to take it all over again. A hard case—"

"Good Godfrey!" cried Renfrew. "I've got it!"

He leaped to his feet. "Come on, Major!" he cried. "I'm going for a joy ride!"

"The man's daft!" exclaimed Stevens, and he laughed at the pyrotechnic radiance of Renfrew's mien. But he stopped laughing when Renfrew spoke again,

for the major's voice had had a flint-like hardness in it, which gave his words great authority.

"We must go over to the hangars alone, Mac," he said. "I think I've got your man for you, and I think I can prove he's the criminal by merely risking my neck. Now just come on over and back me up in whatever I demand. Or, better—let me go first, and then follow me in a few minutes. That will give your appearance the element of surprise, which is valuable in such matters. Remember, you follow me to the D Flight hangars in about four or five minutes."

McQuarrie nodded and joined Stevens in a stare of complete amazement as Renfrew strode from the room.

CHAPTER XXVI

DESPERATE DETECTING

LEAVING the orderly room, Renfrew walked immediately and briskly to the line of huge sheds, which housed the planes of the squadron. The weather precluded flying, and the results of the bomb raid provided work for all rank and file of the squadron, so that the hangars were comparatively deserted. Only the flight sergeants and a handful of mechanics were about. Renfrew made straight for D Flight hangars and addressed a mechanic who was at work in the entrance.

"Send Flight Sergeant Applegate to me at once," he ordered.

Applegate came from the hangar as though he wore heavy boots, but he greeted Renfrew pleasantly and smiled when he saluted.

"Wheel out Major McQuarrie's machine," ordered Renfrew. "I shall take it up for a flight."

The smile left Applegate's face, and the chalky whiteness spread over his countenance like a mask. His eyes flinched.

"Not to-day, sir," he protested. "Surely you are not going up to-day." He gazed despairingly upon the drizzly expanse of airdrome and upon the low hanging clouds which wetly caressed the earth.

"Now," snapped Renfrew. "And, Applegate! It is Major McQuarrie's bus I want. No other."

The man was gazing at him with something which verged upon panic, but he pulled himself together with an effort, and again voiced his desperate protest.

"But the weather, sir," he cried. "I couldn't let the major's machine go out in this weather without his orders."

But Major McQuarrie had appeared around the corner of D Flight hangar, and Renfrew addressed him before the wretched Applegate was aware of his commander's presence.

"I have asked the sergeant to wheel out your plane, Major McQuarrie," said Renfrew coolly. "Will you kindly tell him that I have your orders?"

"Of course," said the major. Then he stood, as though startled, and gazed upon the sergeant curiously. Applegate stood at attention for a moment, obviously at bay. Then his countenance was suddenly transformed as the blood mounted to his face, and the fear in his eyes gave way to a peculiar expression of grim resignation. He clicked his heels smartly, saluted, and about turned to superintend the rolling forth of the major's machine.

"Watch closely," whispered Renfrew in the moment during which Applegate left him alone with McQuarrie. "And when we take off, stand by to follow. Better get a car turning over as soon as we run up our engine."

McQuarrie studied him in perplexity. Renfrew seemed extraordinarily cold and grim.

"Who's going up with you?" McQuarrie asked.

"Just watch," said Renfrew. "Watch closely."

The machine was on the tarmac now, and Renfrew strode over to it. Applegate watched his approach with a face which was pale again, but with dark eyes that were terribly calm.

"Will Major McQuarrie be going up with you, sir?" he asked, as Renfrew took his place at the wing, and McQuarrie hung back at the hangar.

"No," said Renfrew, gazing steadily at the sergeant's face.

"But you will need ballast," said Applegate, and his voice faltered.

"Yes," said Renfrew. "I shall need ballast. You'd better get into the observer's cockpit yourself."

He said it quite quietly, but the effect upon Applegate was amazing. His jaw dropped suddenly, and then, as suddenly snapped back as he clenched his teeth. His face became horribly gray, and a glassy stare took his eyes off focus, so that he seemed bereft of sight. Then, as though tearing himself out of a trance, he strode around the wing and came close to Renfrew, whom he addressed in a muffled voice.

"I can't, sir," he mumbled. "My heart, sir, it's bad. I can't go up into the air."

Renfrew's steady gaze did not waver from the man's livid countenance.

"That's a lie, Applegate!" he murmured in a voice

which barely reached the other's ear. "Get into that cockpit immediately!"

Applegate's eyes begged for mercy, but there was no mercy in Renfrew's gaze.

"It's both of us then!" he said miserably, and clambered into the observer's cockpit as Renfrew took the pilot's seat. From that moment, Applegate said no other word. He stood in the cockpit with bent head, and gazed glassily into space. Renfrew, appearing to have heard nothing of the man's last remark, turned his attention to getting under way.

"Switch off, petrol open!" he cried; and the mechanic turned the prop to suck the mixture into the cylinders.

"Right, sir," cried the mechanic, leaping away from the prop.

Renfrew glanced quickly about to see that the men were on wings and tail.

"Contact!" he cried, and switched on the self-starter. McQuarrie noticed as the engine roared that Renfrew was strangely pale.

He ran up his engine, gained his temperature and tested his pressure. Then he gave the signal and the mechanics freed one wing and the tail. The chocks were removed from the wheel, and, with one mechanic pressing his inside wing, he swung about and taxied on to the airdrome.

"Bad day for a flight," remarked one mechanic to another, as they saw him go.

"Leave it to the major," was the answer. "'E's

good any weather. But wot's 'e goin' dahn to Paris for? Shoppin'?"

For Renfrew was taxiing his plane swiftly down wind to the extreme leeward end of the airdrome. He was certainly giving himself all the room possible for his take-off. He turned about into the wind with the hedge which bound the western end of the drome close behind his tail, so that when he opened his engine he had all the length of the airdrome before him.

They saw him sweep down that long grassy stretch, and they saw to their surprise that when the time came for him to rise, he did not rise, but instead kept his wheels close to the ground, skimming over the grass tops at seventy, eighty, ninety miles an hour.

"Lord, w'y don't 'e get orf?" cried the bewildered mechanics; and McQuarrie, standing beside a tender with purring engine, wondered why as well. Then he cried out sharply as he saw something happen which caused him to leap into the waiting car and drive forth at top speed down the road which lined the drome.

Renfrew had kept the machine down to the ground, because he expected disaster. He had hoped it would happen before he left the drome, but wherever it occurred, he was ready for it. As he sped across the grass he exerted every nerve of his body to feel every fiber of his plane. As he reached the low wall which bounded the eastern end of the drome, he lifted her, not gently, but with a jerk of the stick backward, and another jerk forward, which took her over the wall in a mighty buck-jump. And then it happened.

Renfrew felt the TUNG! of a wire snapped. He switched off immediately and shut off his gas. The machine dipped sideways as one wing crumpled, and Renfrew, with his elevators, brought down the tail as she hit the ground. She crashed and skidded with that metallic roar which marks complete destruction. Up went her tail with a snap that threw Renfrew heavily forward on his belt and brought his head up against the cowling with a dazing crash. But, almost automatically, he disconnected his belt like lightning and hurled himself from the wreckage even as the gasoline took fire. When McQuarrie arrived he found Renfrew sitting coolly on a stone regarding with somber eyes the ghastly wreck which burned brightly in the dim light of the cloudy day.

McQuarrie was so genuinely glad to find his friend alive that neither man could speak for a moment. Then McQuarrie turned to the wreck.

"Where's Applegate?" he asked. "In there?" he shuddered.

"No," said Renfrew gravely. "That's Applegate." He pointed to what seemed a heap of khaki clothing which lay some distance from the wreckage. "He neglected to adjust his flying belt," explained Renfrew. "When the tail snapped up, he was flung out. We were making ninety miles per hour, and it was a fearful cropper. He broke his neck."

"Poor fellow!" said McQuarrie.

"No," said Renfrew, "It was good luck. If he'd survived he'd have faced a firing squad."

McQuarrie gazed at him in perplexity.

"He was the man?" he asked. Renfrew nodded.

"How do you know?" asked the Major.

"When Stevens mentioned that you had enough evidence in your office to break him," said Renfrew, "I saw the light. I had been going to take up your bus yesterday, but Applegate was scared to death when I ordered it out, and then tricked me into taking another one. I couldn't forget his strange behavior then, but when Stevens said what he did after the bombing raid, I suddenly saw the truth. Applegate of all men would profit by the destruction of your office hut, and he'd be still better off if you got pipped as well. That is why he wouldn't let me use your bus. Not counting on a raid, he had decided to put you out of the way by tampering with the wires of your machine. That's what I guessed, and I decided to test it."

McQuarrie was gazing at him with evident astonishment.

"You mean to say you deliberately took up a bus that you believed had been fixed to crash?"

"Well, yes," admitted Renfrew. "You see, feeling pretty sure of it gave me an advantage. I hoped she'd crash before we left the drome and was counting on her buckling before I had to get off the ground. I'd have hopped hedges all the way to Wipers and back, if it had held together long enough." He laughed. "But it happened," he said, with obvious relief. "You saw the way Applegate acted when I made him fly. And as he climbed in he muttered that it was both of

us together, then. That was enough to convince me, but a more concrete evidence came when I felt the wires give. He must have taken the screws out of the turn buckles and put them on again with brads. Now let us go back to tea."

McQuarrie stared at him, fascinated.

"Of all the cold steel nerve," he cried. "You've got the edge on Sheffield steel, preferred." And together, they went home to tea.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SEA PATROL

THE greatest rewards of adventure lie in the friendships which are made; for the man who has shared a tight place with you in some out of the way portion of this earth, is a man whom you will never forget. You may not see him often, and it is not the way of men to write long letters; but you will remember him; and the happiest moments of your life will be those moments when, in unexpected places, under circumstances of which you and he have never dreamed, your comrade of adventures in the past comes face to face with you.

Sometimes the chances which bring such a meeting about are no more extraordinary than such an occasion as requires you to go to the Grand Central Station for a train to New London and be tapped on the shoulder as you enter the gates by a man who rode the rapids with you in the Yukon; but sometimes the meeting is attended by such peculiar circumstances as make the occasion a story in itself. For Renfrew and Charlie Mordaunt to meet again, a world war was necessary, and a battle in the air which brought Renfrew down, wounded, to occupy a place on the side lines until he was prepared to fly with the scouts again.

They had come together for the first time in the town of Ledbitter, in British Columbia, where Renfrew, seeking a man to expose a group of thugs who victimized a mining town, had picked upon the youngster, Charlie Mordaunt. But Mordaunt had been afraid, convinced that he lacked the courage which Renfrew's plan demanded. Renfrew had shown him that he possessed the necessary courage by showing him that fear was worse than death; and that knowledge had made it possible for Charlie Mordaunt to lead a horde of hard men who had thought him a coward. Renfrew had remembered him, and, remembering, had wondered whether the youngster had been able to retain his hold upon that spirit which had made him for that certain time a man. But when the war came, it took Renfrew far away from Ledbitter, and it seemed as though he might never have the opportunity to discover how long a time Mordaunt had been able to sustain that essay into heroism. Then chance brought him to the sea.

It was five weeks since Renfrew had been shot down. The doctors told him that he was not yet fit for combat flying, and he knew that the doctors were right. So he passed his time as a guest of Squadron One-sixty, and when he was not busy, it was his custom to take Smitty into the air for a quiet, droning visit to the sea. They would soar above the fishing villages and trail their wheels in the ground swell as they played about the bays and dunes of the North Sea coastline.

One day they dropped in for a visit upon the little

bay which sheltered a seaplane patrol squadron, and the officers of the Royal Naval Air Service who didn't often entertain such a champion of the scouts as Major Renfrew was in those days, gave them a hearty welcome. Renfrew was curious about their work.

"Submarine patrol," explained Commander Harding, whose lean face was made red by the sea winds, and whose clear blue eyes were cold as steel. "We can see 'em from the air when they're twenty feet down, and we drop bombs on them. Depth charges, you know. Most of our casualties are sea casualties; bad weather; fog which crashes our machines on the headlands, flying low; and dud engines thirty miles out of sight of land. Then Fritz plays some queer tricks, too. That accounts for some of our men."

"What sort of queer tricks?" asked Renfrew.

"You never know till you meet them. That's what makes them tricks, you know. There's lots of thrills to the work. Why don't you flit over and take up one of our machines?"

Renfrew's eyes sparkled.

"To-morrow?" he said. Harding nodded.

"To-morrow," he agreed.

In the morning Renfrew alighted on the field of Seaplane Patrol Squadron Twenty-two, and taxied his little single-seater prettily up to the tarmac. Harding met him and took him over to the landing stage.

"Think you can fly 'em?" he asked, as the mechanics brought a dainty, two-seater Sop Hydro up to the float. "Just keep her pontoons out of the water, and you're

all right. You'll find they tend to catch crabs and trip you up, but if you treat her as a bird that was never meant to touch water, she'll take care of herself—takes off and lights like a bloomin' gull. The bomb releases are the same as your 9, if you need 'em."

He gazed at the lovely machine which bobbed gently in the swell, with a fondness born of perfect understanding.

"Here's Bentley," he said. "He'll go up with you, and show you points of interest on the North Sea. Better put on the phones and then you can be chatty. You'll probably want to let him show you the ropes. He's a good youngster. Ben, you met Major Renfrew yesterday."

The tow-headed youth in blue nodded at Renfrew cheerily, while he adjusted the goggles which had been reposing high on his forehead.

"I'll have to depend on you for compass course and good advice," smiled Renfrew, appreciatively; and he clambered into the pilot's cockpit. Bentley climbed in behind him, and Renfrew got busy with his gadgets. The mechanics brought the machine around so that her prop was over the float, and swung it while Renfrew fed the engine its fuel.

"All clear!" he sang out. And, as the mechanics cleared the propeller, "Contact!" he switched on and the engine roared, but it caught in its roar and spluttered for a moment as he revved it up.

"What's up?" cried Harding, alert as a good host should be for the security of his guest.

"Throttle control bar stuck a little, that's all," replied Renfrew.

"Want another bus?"

But Renfrew had no desire to place the extreme degree of perfection which a flyer demands of his most minute item of equipment before the courtesy which he felt was due his host.

"No, it's all right, thanks," said he; and he had taken off from clear water before he realized that he had made a rather reckless sacrifice to courtesy. Harding was quick to notice the jerk with which the engine picked up, coughed, and burst forth again into full blast as Renfrew made his take off, and he frowned.

"That throttle bar's too darn sticky," he muttered.

But Renfrew was soaring smoothly through an unclouded sky, making straight for the bronze sunlight which filled the hazy expanse above him, and breathing deeply of the salt sea air through which his propeller forged its way. The sea was a floor of turquoise below him; a floor of turquoise streaked with fair green jade; a floor of many opalescent tints which moved in a rhythmic swell and sent a shower of glittering gold from the many facets of its billows.

"North northwest by two and a half west," came Bentley's voice in the ear phones. "Better stick at seven thousand feet for visibility in this haze."

"North northwest by two and a half west it is," replied Renfrew as he tilted into a bank which swept him into the course for which Bentley called.

For some moments they sped through the air in the

fine golden sunlight until the land had disappeared and the translucent haze enclosed the moving floor of sea below them in a great circle of shimmering gossamer. Renfrew looked down, and then, turning, gazed behind him. There was Bentley, at ease upon his stool, his machine gun poking upward from its ratchet and his blue eyes smiling into Renfrew's own. Beyond Bentley, the elevators and rudder of the plane, and—nothing, save the far reaching sea, and the opalescent curtain of the mist. Renfrew knew then the thrill of being entirely dependent on his engine. A forced landing here would mean a long gamble between the weather, the water, and the arrival of a rescue tender which might come if the wireless message reached shore.

"Barque to starboard," came Bentley's voice in the phone. "Sailing vessel directly off our starboard bow. Better drift over and give a look-see."

Renfrew scanned the water below him for the reported vessel, but it was several moments before his landsman's eye detected the wraith-like object which Bentley had discerned at a great distance. Far before him, to the right of his bow, a tiny form was enshrouded in the haze which hugged the water. It looked like a toy sailboat on an imitation ocean, and Renfrew smiled at the thought of treating seriously so trivial a little fisherman as this barque seemed to be.

"Down and look her over?" he called into his phone.

"Just circle over her till I can see what the glasses show," replied Bentley.

That was easy enough, and Renfrew held the plane steadily on her course until the wraith of a boat had emerged from the haze and become a veritable sailing vessel which became foreshortened as the plane rapidly gained its place above her, and sank below them until it was a diminutive object on the floor of water just to Bentley's right. He banked, then, and made the image of that sailboat the center of a series of great circles. Bentley, behind him, held the vessel in the field of his glasses while he focused them.

"Its a two-masted schooner," he said. "Fisherman I think, and the flag is French."

"There's a steamer coming up from the west," said Renfrew; but Bentley, intent on his observations, did not hear him. Renfrew continued to circle, while he tried to keep in his eye on the black smoke which betrayed the coming of the steamer.

"She's afire!" cried Bentley suddenly. And Renfrew's attention was snapped back to the toy sailboat which lay so peacefully on the toy ocean below them. Sure enough, from the forward section of the little craft, a cloud of dark smoke was belching.

"She seems to be signaling us," said Bentley.

"Go down?" queried Renfrew, and dropped in his lovely curve, toward the water.

"Right-o, may be a fisherman needing help."

Renfrew throttled down and started a series of zigzagging glides toward the water.

"Hello," cried the voice in the phone. "There's a cargo boat beating up from westward."

"Told you so," grinned Renfrew. The steamer, little more than a dot in the distant hazes, was apparently headed directly toward the sailing vessel. "Wonder if he sees her signals?" Renfrew thought.

They were now about fifteen hundred feet above the sailboat, and the smoke which poured from her fo'c'sle no longer obscured the group of men who seemed to rush about her decks intent upon the desperate business of subduing the invisible flames, while a man on the quarter-deck waved frantically up at them.

"Fire seems to be under hatches," cried Bentley. "Better not go lower."

Whereupon Renfrew pushed his throttle and found that it would not move forward.

"Better not get lower!" cried Bentley rather sharply. "It may be a trap!"

"Can't help it!" yelled Renfrew. "The throttle bar's jammed!" And he coolly worked the little lever with one hand while with the other hand and his feet, he turned the plane away from the vessel in a wide curve, and straightened out to alight on the water to the east of her beam.

"A fat lot of help we'll be," exclaimed Bentley, nervously. "And I don't like the way they're behaving aboard that craft. WOW! It's a trap!"

For a high pitched, staccato rattle arose from the deck of the sailing craft, and the machine gun bullets whined through the air about them. Bentley leaped for his gun, but Renfrew halted him.

"Don't fire!" he cried. "They can blow us to bits if we fight!"

Bentley held his fire, and the crew of the schooner evidently respected the flyer's predicament as they saw the plane alight on the surface of the sea.

They had hardly touched the water before a boat's crew began to lower the little dinghy which was cradled in the stern. Renfrew and Bentley saw the men at work. They saw the tiny boat fall to the water, and the men tumble over the side to man it. Then it waited there, under the stern of its mother ship while the oarsmen spoke with one who leaned over the rail.

"What in blazes is their game?" cried Bentley in bewilderment. For the little dinghy was being hauled aboard the schooner once more.

"Scared," suggested Renfrew, while with a cool hand he followed the throttle bar along until he found the bend which jammed it.

"Hardly," said Bentley. "See those signals?" But Renfrew had disappeared under the cockpit hood.

"What they say?" came his muffled voice.

"International code," reported Bentley. "They say that they have us under their guns. If we move they will blow us out of the water. And if I'm not mistaken they carry two six pounders to do it with."

Renfrew came up to the air again.

"When I get this gadget straightened, I'm going to fly up and let you drop a bomb on 'em," he said cheerfully. "Tell 'em that."

"But why aren't they taking care of us? Are they

crazy? They can surely see that the engine's ticking over."

Renfrew was examining the vessel shrewdly, and as he did so the seaplane drifted away with the North Sea swell so that the field of his vision beyond the sailing vessel was widened.

"They're waiting to trap that cargo boat," he said quietly. "If the steamer sees them firing on us he'll have time to get away. As it is, he's seen us alight as though to parley with a French barque, and will come right along into their trap. Lord, I've got to get this thing fixed!" He dived under the hood again, while Bentley sat and helplessly watched the freighter approach her doom.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RENFREW MEETS A FRIEND

THE steamer had now emerged from the haze of distance, and loomed up as a murky cargo boat of some seven thousand tons, her single funnel belching smoke and the red ensign of the merchant service gayly flapping in her stern. The crew's washing hung out on a line below the derrick boom, and the figures of a few men could be seen along the rail. Serenely, with a sort of bluff friendliness in her aspect, she steamed toward the port side of the little schooner which flew the flag of France. And then Bentley noticed that a man on board the schooner was signaling vigorously from a point to starboard of the after deck house which concealed him from the approaching steamer.

Bentley gazed at the semaphore which the man's arms described in puzzlement. The message was obviously in code, so that it could not be meant for Renfrew and himself. Who then, was the German signaling?

Bentley inspected the heaving body of the water which lay behind and about them, and his heart sank, as he descried the slow progress of a little tube which, poking above the surface, moved lazily through the

water some hundred yards away. It was a periscope.

"They've got the poor fellows trapped!" he cried to Renfrew. "The schooner's a decoy boat for a sub, and the vermin's making around to get her."

Renfrew arose from his concealment again in time to see the periscope disappear as the submarine slid, like a sea monster, into a depth which would permit her to fire a torpedo without the freighter sighting her.

"I've freed the throttle bar," murmured Renfrew, his eyes on the advancing steamer. "Now it's just a matter of getting this bolt home. . . ."

Bentley grabbed him by the arm.

"Look!" he cried.

From a point five hundred yards off the steamer's port bow a thin ripple ran swiftly across the water toward the merchantman which was now some seven hundred yards due west of the schooner. It was as though some fleet animal of the sea were stealing up unobserved upon its prey.

"Sta'b'rd your helm!" shrieked Bentley. "Oh, why don't they sta'b'rd their helm?"

And as though he heard that cry, the freighter's helmsman threw the ship over to starboard, so that the torpedo struck it a glancing blow abaft the funnel. The black fury of the explosion threw a great mass of water into the air with it, and for a moment the center of the ship vanished behind a column of destruction. The column fell again upon the calm sea, and a gaping hole in the side of the steamer slowly became smaller, as the ship began to settle by the stern.

Immediately a bustle of activity became apparent on the deck of the wounded vessel. Men ran hither and thither, in the orderly chaos of sailormen freeing the lifeboats to abandon a sinking ship.

"Airrh!" exclaimed Renfrew, with fire in his eyes. "I've done it! Shall we make a break for the air and bomb them?"

"Wait!" snapped Bentley. "They've got us covered, and we'd go down before we got off the water. Let 'em get used to us for a minute."

"Look! They're signaling from the tramp!" said Renfrew.

"Good men!" Bentley smiled radiantly. "It's admiralty code. They're telling the schooner to run for it! And they've only a minute to get away!"

It was true. Leaving a sinking ship, the sailors aboard the freighter had lingered long enough to signal that warning to the schooner which they believed to be their friend.

"Now what?" growled Bentley.

As the boats left the side of the sinking freighter, the submarine arose to the surface six hundred yards aft its victim's port quarter, and began to move leisurely around its stern. Submarine captains were obliged to record the identity of all ships they sent down. As the U-boat made its calm survey, the schooner gave forth an inward roar, and powerful engines set her in stately motion. At the same time a group of sailors aboard the schooner began to clear away a mass of sail cloth which covered an object over the center hatches.

"It's a twelve pounder!" whispered Bentley hoarsely. "What are they up to?"

"Going to sink the hulk," replied Renfrew. "Now's our time to fly for it."

Bentley seized his arm even as he pressed the throttle.

"No, they're covering us with a six pounder in the stern," he warned. "And they've got machine guns, too."

"Can't help it," said Renfrew. "We've got to do our best. If they get us it'll just be one plane missing. If we get them, it's a U-boat gone and tons of shipping saved."

"They're not going after the survivors?" gasped Bentley; and Renfrew looked up to see the U-boat swing slowly about to bear down on the two boats which were pulling away from the freighter. There were several men on the U-boat's deck, and the two big 5.9-inch guns mounted fore and aft were manned by German sailors. Renfrew was in time to see an officer, presumably the captain, hail the nearest boat. The British sailors kept pulling away from him.

"We've got to get up," said Renfrew quietly, for he remembered ugly stories of survivors being fired on. "If we let them fire on those boats, we'll never live it down."

But he was conscious of the fact that the schooner, presenting her stern to them as she drew up toward the port side of the slowly settling freighter, was covering the plane with a gun which bore directly upon them. It seemed a predicament which was utterly

hopeless. Yet they might by chance gain speed quickly enough to frustrate the German fire.

"Shall I chance it?" he snapped.

"Sure!" cried Bentley, and stared at him with a face as white as a sheet. "But let's shake before we go up." He grinned. "The machine guns," he said.

Renfrew nodded, and took the youngster's proffered hand.

"Cheerio!" he said, and turned to the freighter that he might get the wind from her smoking funnels.

A shot was fired from the schooner as he turned, and he was in time to see the impossible occur. From the depth of the sinking steamer a bell rang noisily. Instantly an astounding transformation took place. What had seemed to be a deck house on her forward deck collapsed, and a twelve-pound gun was revealed, manned by a half dozen men. The sail cloth awning which fell from her bridge to the center hatches was torn away, and two six pounders appeared, while the two lifeboats which remained in the davits forward of the funnel fell apart to reveal the long gray muzzles of two more heavy guns.

This all happened in the split second of the ringing of that bell, and the revealment of those guns was instantly followed by a burst of fire from each muzzle and the rattle of a half dozen machine guns from the forward bridge. At the same time the white ensign of the British Navy ran, fluttering, up the foremast, and spread its red crossed emblem to the breeze.

"Good gravy!" yelled Bentley. "It's a Q-ship!"

Then everything happened at once. The schooner seemed absolutely to recoil as the freighter's fire brought down her foremast and swept her decks with the death-dealing shower of the machine guns. The submarine, fairly trapped, started its engines going with a roar as her conning tower was blown into a thousand splinters.

But the Q-ship's fire failed to cripple severely either enemy craft, for it raked the schooner too high, and the conning tower, being a superstructure of the submarine, left the interior uninjured. The schooner swung about and leveled her twelve pounder at the freighter, as the U-boat, propelled by her mighty engines, drew swiftly out of range. The transformed freighter followed the submarine with her fire, but failed to gain a hit, while the schooner, at point-blank range, placed a shell in the waste of the wallowing steamboat which smashed the six-pound guns to wreckage and scattered their crews into a mass of dead and wounded. At the same moment Renfrew shoved his throttle home and the seaplane took the air with a mighty roar which carried her, soaring from the surface of the water between the British Q-ship and the German U-boat.

Up, up, they soared, and as they gained height, they saw below them a battle far removed from such naval engagements as modern warfare usually presented. It was a battle such as Drake and Frobisher might have fought. A battle of close quarters between a crippled steamer, heavily awash in the heaving swell, a motor-

driven schooner, and a swift moving submarine which could not submerge.

It was the strategy of the Q-ships, those heroic decoys which lured the U-boats to their doom, to take the enemy's torpedo fire in the guise of a merchantman, appear to abandon the ship, which, being loaded with lumber, could not sink, and then wait until the U-boat approached to identify it, and let go with all its concealed guns. If they could sink the U-boat with that first fire, they accomplished their grim purpose with no further loss than the explosion of the torpedo might cost them. If they failed to accomplish this, they had to fight a formidable enemy while in a crippled condition.

In this case the gallant Q-ship had not only to fight the submarine which mounted two heavy guns, but it had also to deal with the schooner. As Renfrew climbed, swiftly adjusting his bomb sights, he saw the submarine, now withdrawn to a distance of two thousand yards from the steamer, turn broadside to its victim, and bring both its big guns to bear. The guns were fired even as Renfrew swept about to curve over the U-boat.

The plane roared over the submarine and Renfrew let go a bomb. It missed the monster by yards, and Renfrew saw the U-boat plunge with the shock of the depth charge as the explosion sent a column of water high in the air. Then he swung the plane about in a steeply banked spiral, and as he did so, he glanced again toward the smoking fury from which sounded the roar

of the battling decoy boats. He saw a sheet of flame shoot skyward, and a mass of wreckage ascend from the spot where the schooner had been, and he saw the Q-ship spitting its defiance from a cloud of smoke. Again the guns of the submarine spoke, and the shots registered with a spurt of wreckage in the steamer's shattered stern.

He dipped, and raked the deck of the submarine with his machine guns, and then, swooping upward, he turned skillfully to drop another bomb. Heroically, the Q-ship lumbered toward its enemy as Renfrew's second bomb dropped forward of the submarine and sent its bow high in the air with its explosion.

"Give yourself more room," spoke Bentley's voice in the phone; and Renfrew swept far ahead of the submarine while a burst of shrapnel tore through his fabric as an intimation that the U-boat had its anti-aircraft gun in action.

He turned again, and saw the steamer wallowing painfully toward the U-boat. The schooner had disappeared, leaving only a mass of wreckage to mark its resting place; and the Q-ship, crippled and shattered into a shapeless hulk, gamely engaged its remaining foe. Renfrew felt a keen and intensely exhilarating thrill of admiration for the men who manned that wreck, and he voiced it into his phone as he swept over the submarine once more.

"We'll get 'em this time! We have to get 'em!" he cried. And he saw a burst of flame and splinters

arise from the fore deck of the Q-ship as a shell from the submarine exploded.

With infinite care Renfrew gazed through his bomb sight, and the single movement with which he released that bomb contained all his nerve and vitality. He threw the plane over on its side as he heard through the phone the exclamation with which Bentley greeted the shot and the two flyers watched the bomb descend. The submarine was moving, while the shells of the Q-ship fell all about it, and the bomb seemed headed for the open water on the starboard bow. But just as the bomb swept downward the Q-ship's fire crowded the U-boat's port bow, and it veered to starboard. The bomb struck home just forward of the conning tower. A ghastly burst of smoke and flame concealed everything save the U-boat's stern which plunged high out of the water. Then the air cleared, and they saw the massive submarine shoot into her last dive, leaving a mess of oil and wreckage in the vortex which her plunge created.

The plane was turned over like a tiny kite by the concussion and Renfrew came out of the disturbance in a spin which he only conquered when three hundred feet above the water. Coolly he straightened her out, and sweeping around the bow of the Q-ship, upon which the only sign of life was the smoke which still drifted from her funnels, he landed neatly beside her.

From a great distance the boats were coming back. They seemed the only sign of life upon the calm and slowly heaving surface of the sea. Renfrew taxied

up to the edge of the ravaged steamer, and hailed the silent, wallowing hulk.

From the shattered chaos of her deck a group of three men appeared—men with black faces, which were marked with blood.

"Anything we can do?" yelled Renfrew.

"Nothing, thanks," cried one of the men cheerily. "A wireless says we can expect assistance momentarily. But stand by a minute. Captain Mordaunt wishes to thank you."

Renfrew climbed from his cockpit and deftly jumped to the slippery deck of the Q-ship, and as he did so two sailors, black with the stains of battle, came forward bearing between them a young man who leaned heavily on their supporting arms.

"You saved the game, sir," said the young captain, whose face was so smeared with grime as to be quite unrecognizable. "If you hadn't—my God! It's Renfrew!" he cried.

And that is how Renfrew met for the second time Charlie Mordaunt of Ledbitter, British Columbia; and that is how Renfrew discovered that the man who had been afraid he lacked courage had found a greater courage than most men possess.

CHAPTER XXIX

TWO QUEER ONES

TWO weeks later Renfrew and Mordaunt were sitting at a table in the Criterion Grill at Piccadilly Circus. Mordaunt spoke quietly and modestly. Renfrew asked questions.

"You can hardly blame me," said Renfrew, "it is a long shot from Ledbitter, British Columbia, to the decks of a fighting ship in the North Sea."

Charlie Mordaunt chuckled.

"And a long shot from a wretched hotel clerk in that mining camp, to the commander of a Q-ship, eh?" he asked.

"No," said Renfrew. "My curiosity had nothing to do with that. But I can't see the Q-ship part of it."

Mordaunt leaned across the table and spoke to his friend very seriously.

"Of all men in the world, Major," he said, "you have a right to know. You found me out in Ledbitter, a little tin sport, gambling with dollars that were not my own; and you came along to show me that I could gamble with my life to save my soul. Now here we are sitting in a London grillroom, officers of equal rank, recovering from wounds received in such queer places as the air above and the waters under the earth.

And I'll bet you're thinking that I'm not the same man as that hotel clerk which you made into the sheriff of Ledbitter. You're thinking that I don't speak the same language, or think the same thoughts. I'll bet you're thinking that in some extraordinary way I've swapped the soul and body of Charlie Mordaunt for the soul and body of an entirely different man."

He sat back and regarded Renfrew with a quiet smile. But he didn't let Renfrew answer him.

"You're right," he said before the other could speak. "That's just what I've done. Or rather that's just what's been done for me. You started it. Then the sea took hold of me, and the war on the sea. Danforth had a lot to do with it; he put me where I am to-day. But you are the man who started it, and you've got a right to know. I mean you've got a right to know about the whole thing, the whole extraordinary twist of things."

And Renfrew, knowing that he was about to hear a story which he would be powerless to interrupt, settled back in his chair and let the thin minor voice of the violin which sang its quiet strain in the distance play an accompaniment to the firm voice of the man who spoke.

When the war began [said Mordaunt] I went into Vancouver to join up with the rest. But they wouldn't have me because my eyes were bad. Yes, I know. I didn't have any idea of it either, but there it was, my eyes were bad, and they wouldn't have me. Then

somebody told me that the requirements as to eyes weren't so strict in the Navy, and I crossed over to Halifax to try for a sea-going job. At Halifax I discovered that they didn't want me in the Navy either, and I was advised to go into the merchant marine and look about for service in the Naval Reserve whenever the opportunity offered. The Navy men were very decent about it, and they found me a place as supercargo on a tramp steamer named *Verdant* which was loading in the harbor.

I felt fairly large and exuberant that night, and joined a party of cavalry men for a swell dinner at the Royal Victoria. There's a little grillroom at the Royal Victoria in Halifax which holds about six round tables; and the tables are so close together that they give the room a very chummy, intimate effect. Almost every seat at those tables was taken when we entered, and every man in the room but me was an officer of the Army or Navy. I felt small again. But the party was a jolly one, and I'd fairly well forgotten my mufti before the coffee was served.

Then a couple of tall fellows came into the room, and some naval officers at the table next to ours—so close, mind you, that we chatted from table to table as if we sat together—these naval chaps snapped out something in cool, hard voices which sent a funny, electric wave of embarrassment about the little room. It was something they said about a not-to-be-repeated sort of slacker.

The two tall fellows came brushing their way be-

tween the tables, and I looked up at them. One was a kid not more than nineteen or so, with pink cheeks and a mop of yellow hair. The other was a lean, dark fellow, unusually tall, with black hair and a close cropped black beard. He was a very handsome chap with rather piercing dark eyes, and he looked interesting; like an Elizabethan captain, you know. I noticed that the naval officers at the next table drew in toward the board as the tall fellow scraped by them, and as soon as he and the kid had passed, they fell to murmuring in scornful voices. Then, in another minute, the fire broke through the hatches.

The Navy men beside us had been drinking, and one of them, a rather supercilious youngster, was fairly heated up with the fumes. All of a sudden he jumped up from his place and sent his chair falling back with a clatter.

"I don't know how it is with you, gentlemen," he cried, "but I'm damned if I'll dine in the same room with that black-bearded slacker!" And he shoved aside his fallen chair to make for the door.

We all turned to the tall fellow at that, of course, looking for bloody murder. He stood up almost the instant the officer's mouth was open and watched him with his piercing black eyes until the fellow had finished. Then, as the youngster turned to the door, he spoke.

"Wait a minute!" he cried. And, by golly, his voice snapped around that room like an electric spark.

The young naval officer stood still, and stared at him

with an extraordinarily offensive sneer. It looked as though there would be the devil to pay for a moment. Then the tall, dark fellow spoke down to the kid who'd come in with him.

"Come along," he said smoothly, "it seems we're disturbing these gentlemen at their dinner." And to my eternal amazement the two of them brushed by the young fire-eater and left the room.

"Sit down," laughed an older officer at the next table, "you're making a fool of yourself."

The youngster who'd caused the trouble obeyed him sulkily.

"Fool or no fool," he cried, "that swine's the worst sort of slacker, and I'm hanged if I'd eat with him."

Whereupon the Navy vindicated itself by telling us what it was all about. The dark fellow was a slacker, all right. He was a retired officer of the Royal Navy when the war opened—Captain Gordon Danforth, retired. And he steamed about the Arctic seas fishing up all sorts of queer fish and things for the benefit of science. He sailed into Halifax harbor in his old tramp steamer just a month or two before I got there, and had been dodging every effort of the Navy men to make him enlist. They had tried to commandeer his boat, finally, and Frampton, the fire-eater, was especially wild about the fellow, because all his efforts to force the man and his dinky steamer into service had been frustrated by some sort of pull the chap seemed to have with the authorities.

"Wait'll they have conscription!" the youngster grumbled. "Conscription of boats and men. That'll bring the beggar to hand. Here we need every ton of shipping, and he uses his dirty little craft to fish for flounders where no torpedoes will reach him!" He was intensely bitter about it.

The next chapter opened in the morning. I spent the night aboard the *Verdant,* feeling important as all get-out in my little cabin under the poop, and I was up at dawn to take over my duties. But nobody else was up at dawn, so I had nothing better to do than chat with the men on watch and stroll about the dock. There was another steamer docked opposite us, and I strolled over to have a look at her. She was a rather trim little tramp of some four thousand tons, painted white, with a yellow superstructure, and I thought at once that she seemed unusually clean and shiny for a ship of her class. The name on her side was *Hansford,* and she flew the Canadian colors. While I was looking at her a voice hailed me, and I looked up to see the yellow-haired kid who had been with Danforth the night before, looking down on me from the navigation bridge.

"Having a look-see?" he cried.

I answered rather apologetically, because a man's always ashamed of his curiosity, you know; but he seemed inclined to be friendly, and he came skipping down the ladder to the deck. On the way he tripped rather unexpectedly and crashed down to the deck in as nasty a fall as I've seen on shipboard.

Almost automatically I jumped up on to the deck to give him a hand, and found him picking himself up very sheepishly. He muttered something about being a clumsy fool, and I stood there, helping him to laugh it off. Then, to make conversation, I said something about it's being a very trim little ship, and threw my eye about the craft. My gaze brought up short on a wide black blotch which marred the clean surface of the deck, and I stood there, looking at it. He saw what I was looking at, and laughed nervously.

"That won't come out," he said. "It's blood. We killed a few seals up in the north, you know." He dropped his eyes uneasily.

Again ashamed of my curiosity, for there was something in his manner which discouraged it, I murmured something silly, and then Danforth appeared.

"Rather early for a call, isn't it?" he said easily, as he came forward from the companionway, and if ever a man conveyed that visitors were not welcome, the cold, hard tone of his voice conveyed it then. So I departed, leaving heaven knows what silly excuses in my wake. Later on that day the *Hansford* slid out of her dock and departed from Vancouver, and two days later we followed suit.

CHAPTER XXX

THE STAIN ON THE DECK

IT took me a couple of trips [continued Mordaunt] to get my sea legs, and the business wasn't made any easier by the practice of sealing every port and hatchway so that no ray of light would betray the craft to any lurking submarine. The air aboard that little steamer was so close and stuffy that I'll warrant any man from the mountains would have been sick if he'd sailed no further from land in her than the end of the dock. But every ton of shipping was beyond price in those days of the submarine campaign, and we nursed our little vessel as if she'd been fashioned of gold and laden with pearls. Then, on the second trip back, we got it.

Fortunately, I never had a chance really to know the officers and crew who manned that vessel, or I'd have felt it rather deeply. The torpedo got us fairly amidship late in the afternoon, and the old boat went down in two parts. When I was picked up a few hours later from the raft which I shared with the corpse of a man whose leg had been ripped off, I was the only living thing afloat on that heaving desert of water. I never saw the submarine which sank us, and I never heard of any of my shipmates again.

The boat which picked me up was a tramp steamer about the size of the one which had just been sunk. I remember that it was painted black with a dirty white superstructure, and the Dutch colors were painted on her side at the waist of the vessel. It was getting dark when I boarded her, and a blood red sunset made everything glow in a lurid and sinister manner. The men helped me up the rope ladder from the dinghy they had let down to get me, and I stood between two of them, staring about me, with my mind in something of a daze.

Then I became aware that a tall, dark man, with unkempt long hair and a shaggy mustache was talking to me with a thick Dutch accent. He wanted to know what ship I was from and when we had been torpedoed.

"Last night," I said. "No, no. This afternoon. About two bells."

But it seemed that he wanted to know the name of my boat. I couldn't remember it. Funny thing that, but it's true. I couldn't remember the name of my boat for the life of me. I just stood there, and wondered why the deck should be so red. The sunset, perhaps; but the sunset couldn't make the deck so red as all that. Then I recalled having seen a stain on a deck before. Black it had been, and now the sunset made it red. A red blotch on the white, sandstoned surface. . . . Seals . . . I remembered that. Something about seals. And then I looked up at the Dutch skipper, and saw that it was Danforth.

"Take him down below and put him to bed," he was

saying, with that queer Dutch accent in his voice. I went with them and got myself under blankets just as if I was moving about in a dream.

In the morning, though, I remembered everything quite clearly. Especially I remembered that the Dutch skipper of this craft was Danforth. In spite of his shabby, unkempt appearance, his tangled mustache and frowsy mop of hair, I knew him because of his eyes. They were the burning eyes of an old-time sea rover. And this dirty little tramp steamer was the neat *Hansford,* whose white hull and yellow deck houses had gleamed beautifully beside us in the dock at Halifax. I knew that because of the bloodstain on her deck.

I was so sure of it all that I was on the point of telling the stocky sailor who brought me coffee and bacon for breakfast to inform Captain Danforth that I wished to speak with him. But I didn't. It occurred to me that all this mystery and disguise might conceal a hidden purpose which would make it unhealthy to betray too wide a knowledge. So I let the sailor go and sat there on the edge of my berth arguing it out with myself.

I'd been at sea during war time long enough to know that queer things had been known to happen. The Germans had a queer way of knowing where ships were and what they carried, and they had a queer way of getting survivors from U-boat disasters back to Germany before ever the submarine which did the deed arrived home. Spies and German sympathizers who sailed under neutral flags turned the seas into places of strange

adventure. Danforth, it seemed, was one of these. But then, said I to myself, he looks like a brave and honest man. Precisely, came back the answering thought; he may honestly believe that Germany is in the right, and be brave enough to fight for her. By heavens! He may be of German blood!

Then he's a spy! declared I hotly to myself. But no man with eyes like his could be a spy. Brave eyes, they were; and that was just the trouble. Spies are brave men, in the histories of their own countries. And if it came to that, hadn't Danforth sailed right into Halifax harbor?

I remember reading, when I was a kid, a book which told how Decatur slipped into a harbor at Tripoli to blow up the frigate *Philadelphia*. The Tripolitan guard on board that captured boat challenged Decatur and his men, who were in a little fishing vessel. Decatur said that they were friends, and when the guard allowed them to board him, they threw him over the side and accomplished their design. That same book told how, later on, Decatur, fighting a Tripolitan vessel, was tricked into boarding her by the Tripolitan captain who pretended to surrender. When Decatur and his men clambered aboard, the enemy tried to slaughter them. The foolish fellow who wrote the book described Decatur's subterfuge as the clever strategy of a great hero, whereas the Tripolitan captain was pilloried as a low and treacherous swine. Yet I'll bet the man had just such a brave and gallant carriage as

Decatur had, and I'll bet neither of them had a braver or more gallant bearing than had Danforth.

See what I mean? There was a war on, and the character of the man meant nothing. Here he was on the scene of a submarine disaster, disguised as a Dutchman. That was all I had to go by. If he was a brave and gallant enemy I was substantially out of luck.

The sailor returned and took me up on deck. I came out of the companionway into a blaze of sun, and the first thing I saw was that stain of blood. I shuddered, and turned my eyes away. They met the eyes of Captain Danforth who stood alone upon the deck, and examined me very keenly.

He was very courteous, asked me how I'd slept, how I felt, and all that. All with that slight Dutch accent which he had assumed the night before.

"The name of your bark, you have not yet tole us!" he said.

Which put me up against it immediately. You see, if he *was* on the wrong side of the fence, it was decidedly up to me to give him as little information as possible.

"First, I should like to know something of the vessel which picked me up," I said.

"Why do you say that?" He affected injured innocence, but the affectation was so obvious to me that it ruined my act.

"Because before I give you any information about the British Mercantile Marine, Captain Danforth, I'd

like to know why the *Hansford* is sailing under neutral colors!" I cried.

At that he gazed on me for a moment without speaking, and then deliberately turned away to lean on the rail and gaze out at sea, drumming with his fingers on the wood.

"I'll have to think that over," he said at last. Standing beside him, I too, gazed out over the sea, watching a wooden box with chicken wire across one end, which drifted slowly by us.

"When you decide," I said, "I'll tell you what I can about my own craft."

And then, suddenly, I realized a very extraordinary thing.

"That box," I blurted out, "is drifting against the tide."

Danforth very coolly turned and gazed at the phenomenon, and then he spoke to me in a low voice which had a cold and knife-like edge to it.

"It's a periscope," he said. "If we abandon ship, you go with the first boat that leaves." And without another word he strode away and went up the ladder to the bridge like a trapeze artist.

CHAPTER XXXI

A BRAVE AND GALLANT MAN

MORDAUNT paused for a moment and stared reflectively at the smoke of the pipe which he held in his hand. His lips were curled in a smile.

The minute Danforth mounted the bridge [he continued] a bell rang, and things began to happen. Odd things. The oddest things in the world.

Out of the hatchway abaft the galley five men crawled. They emerged one after another, so that the line of them had the odd appearance of a snake, for they didn't stand erect as they came up, but wriggled to the rail on their stomachs, and then crawled forward on all fours until they disappeared from my sight around the forward deck house. I heard a metallic rattle inside the deck house, and through the companionway I glimpsed a line of men who came up from below and scrambled through a scuttle overhead without coming out on deck. They carried rifles in their hands, and had cartridge clips in belts about their waists. I counted seven of them before one saw me gaping in at them and closed the hatch.

I heard a hail, and turned away from this sight of

men streaming covertly from the bowels of the ship to see the submarine swaying on the surface with her decks clear of the water. She was some nine hundred yards away, and two sailors were on her deck running up a signal on the little mast she carried. An officer was clambering out from the conning tower, and he was followed by three men who manned the gun which stood like an ugly sort of camera up forward.

I read the signal.

"Heave to and show us your papers."

From above me came a burst of excited Dutch, and I looked up to see our skipper standing on the bridge, waving his arms frantically toward the U-boat. He stood there, his long hair and bedraggled mustache complete; but it wasn't Danforth. It was another man who had put on the wig and mustache. I saw the difference at once.

The submarine officer bellowed something through a megaphone formed of his two hands, and our strange skipper became more excited than ever. He turned away and rang a bell, then, while our boilers began to let off steam, he came running down the ladder, and a number of men ran to their posts at the boats which they started lowering away. It looked as though we were abandoning ship; but I couldn't make head or tail of the proceedings. Where was Danforth? What about the men who had crawled back of the deck house? of the rifle men who were perched somewhere above? Were we going to leave them?

Remembering Danforth's instructions, I made for

the nearest boat which was now filled with men. The bogus captain stood at the davits, and he stopped me.

"Take the starboard boat, laddie," he whispered. So I turned to cross the deck in time to see the starboard boat go down by the foremost fall and dump its crew into the water. With a yell the bos'n let go the other line and jumped over into the boat himself, to start picking up the men. But the boat drifted from the vessel's side, and when I turned to make for another, I found they had all got away.

The ship now appeared deserted, and I ran to the rail, calling after the starboard boat. As I did so I heard a report. A sound like the clap of doom from off the port quarter. I turned and saw that the submarine, content that the ship was abandoned, was shelling us. At first fear seized me. Then I recalled that there were a number of other men with me aboard this strange ship. Hidden men, who gave no sign of their presence, and my fear gave way to wonder.

Again and again the submarine's gun blazed away point-blank at our idle, rolling vessel, and I threw myself on the deck starboard of the steel deck house. Still there was no sign or sound that any one occupied the ship except myself.

Then came a shot which struck home. There was a deafening roar from the after part of the ship, and I saw the black form of a four-inch gun come flying over the bridge. A four-inch gun, mind you, hurtling through the air like a basket ball; and two things like rag dummies flew up from behind the bridge and fell

into the sea. The gun crashed to the deck a few yards from me, and, almost automatically I leaped to my feet, only to flop down again as a couple of four-inch projectiles came smashing through the deck house, and whining over my head.

At the sound of our explosion, the U-boat, like a frightened animal, took in its men and started to submerge. At the same time a great jangling of bells resounded through our ship, and a sailor popped up from behind the deck house within three feet of me. He ran up the companion ladder with a scarlet and white flag over his arm, and the sides of the deck house fell away as he sent the red crossed white ensign of the Royal Navy streaming to the breeze. The sides of the deck house fell, and revealed the long nose of a four-inch gun, while out of the forward hatch ran five riflemen, who took their places under the rail, and another crew of men set to work magically preparing a twelve pounder in a sunken bed which had been hidden by a skylight.

The four-inch gun blazed away as the ensign was run up, and it seemed to hit the submarine at the base of its conning tower as it submerged. But aft of the bridge a cloud of smoke was rising, and a haze of poisonous fumes swept across the deck. Every one in sight seemed oblivious of the fact that we were on fire in the stern, but I, having nothing to do, thought that I might be useful there, so I slid away aft.

When I rounded the after house, I got the smoke and fumes full in the face, and through the haze of it,

I caught a glimpse of hell. Flames were leaping up through the hatchway to starboard, and the wounded survivors of the crew that had manned the destroyed gun lay in a wallow of blood with the flames behind them. On his knees among them, ripping up his shirt for bandages was the yellow-haired kid who'd been with Danforth at Halifax.

On the port side of the deck was a group of men gathered about another four-inch gun, who seemed absolutely oblivious to the fact that the deck beneath them was getting red-hot, and that the flames were blazing higher every minute.

I ran forward toward the group of wounded. That's when I learned how hot the deck was. . . . It brought me up standing, but there was the kid kneeling on it. I plunged forward again.

"Get us some water!" cried the kid. Tears were streaming down his face from the fumes which filled the air, and he was black, like a nigger. He was wounded in the chest, and the blood covered him like a shawl. I rushed forward and got a pail of water at the galley while all the fighting men ignored me.

The submarine broke the surface off our port bow just as I returned with the water. The kid plunged his torn shirt into it, and started to squeeze it into the mouths of the three wounded men. The blood on the hot deck began to stink horribly, and I spilled some of the water about the kid's knees. He grinned as the water sizzled.

"We'll all be going up in a minute," he said grimly. "The magazine's directly below."

I stared at him with horror, and he grinned more widely.

"That's life on a Q-ship," he said. "We're doomed. But Quig's got the torpedo boat destroyer *Halcyon* by wireless, and they'll get here in time to pick up what's left." He was making a tourniquet for a bleeding arm, while he spoke, and across the way that gun crew hugged its gun, eagerly waiting for a chance to bear.

There was a blast of sound, and the ship reared under us, as if struck below by a gigantic sledge hammer. We were torpedoed by the bow.

I heard a man cry out, and stood there, stunned, believing that the magazine was gone. Then I saw Danforth staring down upon us from the bridge, his eyes blazing furiously. He was roaring something at the top of his voice. Over to the port quarter I saw the submarine speeding away across our bows, like a fleeing monster of the sea. She was firing at us as she went, and I could hear her shots crashing through the body of the ship.

I stood there, transfixed, feeling the sway and quiver of the boat, as she sank by the bow, with the deck searing the soles of my feet, the fire blazing at my right, and the fumes stinging my nostrils and choking me. The clap and thunder of the guns and the rattle of our rifles deafened me. I wondered what Danforth was yelling about. Then I looked behind me, and my blood froze. The gun crew had left their gun and

were gathered about a horrible, mangled man, who writhed on the deck and fought off any who tried to help him. He had been transfixed by a great splinter of riven wood. Then I saw what Danforth yelled for. The submarine was making for a point off our stern, and the port gun was the only one that would bear.

I had done some practice with the submarine defense guns, and I jumped at the gun without another thought, as I saw the U-boat taking its crew into its conning tower. I whirled the depressing gear about with a sort of inspired capacity to bring that gun on to its target and I pulled the firing gear on an aim through the open sight. The shot flew high over the forward deck of the U-boat, and with that the gun was taken out of my hands and reloaded, aimed and fired again with incredible swiftness by the crew which my action had rallied. It struck the submarine forward of the conning tower and below it. It nearly tore the thing in two. Up went its bow, and, grotesquely, up went its stern as well. Then it blew up, and left the sea filthy with oil and wreckage.

We were down by the bow at this time—as a matter of fact the nose was fairly torn off of us—and you could feel her growing heavy under your feet. If it hadn't been for the lumber in our hold, we'd have gone down. Danforth came plunging down from the bridge, and grabbed me by both arms.

"Good!" he cried. "Good!" and then, "Come on, there's work to do." Just as if we were cleaning up after a party.

I followed him over to the wounded, and was in time to see the yellow-haired kid collapse. Danforth tried to pick him up from the searing deck, and I ran to help. We carried him to the waist of the ship which was now awash, and then, as the water dashed over the decks, we got the wounded out of the way and went about the business of opening the poop. It was hell, you know, and I'm not swearing. The old-time pictures of hell were just like it, only they didn't have the projectiles going off at unexpected intervals. And the sea, walls of water all about us, coming in upon us, lapping at us hungrily. We were all staggering about, burned, black as vaudeville niggers, stifled with fumes, battered by the sea, tearing at the deck of a sinking vessel to *let the water in!*

Sounds funny, doesn't it? But it wasn't. Our boats came back and took off the wounded, all except Danforth, who was everywhere at once with a gash down the back of his shoulders which had laid his shoulder blade bare. And I worked with him, like a votary working with some priest or prophet. That's the sort of man he was.

All this time, mind you, Quigg, the wireless operator was calling for help. He had caught the Torpedo Boat Destroyer *Halcyon,* and he continued to direct her approach until he was up to his shoulders in water; then one of our pretty explosions sent a twelve pounder crashing through his cabin and shot his key clean through his hand. He came out and fell on the deck where the water rolled him about like a rag doll. I

fell over him, and was pulling him over to the hatchway when the *Halcyon* came up.

Lord, it was funny. We all stood like desert travelers gazing at a mirage. The *Halcyon* came up with two P-boats, submarine chasers, you know. They rushed down upon us and swerved about at full speed in that beautiful way they have. As they shot by us, the men who were tearing up the after deck, got through, and a sheet of flame shot up with a great roar. Six of our men went overboard, and the T.B.D. circled to pick them up. Then a number of T.B.D.s swept down on us from the starboard. Three light cruisers steamed into sight at full speed from off the port bow, and the whole horizon became dotted with destroyers, torpedo boats, P-boats, and a couple of our submarines.

It seemed as though all the light forces of the Navy were out on parade. The sea was full of them. They tore about, like a pack of hounds, smelling out the submarine which we had sent to the bottom. Where they came from Lord only knows, but there they were, a beautiful and thrilling sight. And we stood with a cloud of steam and smoke and flame and fumes sweeping about us, staring at them. Stood on our battered wreck and stared.

They took up our wounded, and the cruisers sent boats to take us aboard while the lighter craft continued to scurry about, protecting them. Danforth, however, wouldn't leave his vessel. He stayed with her while they tried to take her in tow. But line after

line broke, and she finally went down by the bow. She took us down with her—yes, I stayed with Danforth, I'll tell you why in a minute—she took us down with her, but we bobbed up again. They pumped us out on board a cruiser, and I woke up in sick bay.

Of course it was a fool thing to do, sticking aboard that hulk in the face of its certain sinking. But all through the action my mind had been occupied with one definite thought. The thought of Danforth, lying prone upon the bridge while he took the fire of the submarine, and waited for the right minute to reveal his hand. It was the grandest exhibition of nerve I had ever seen, and the man who did it fascinated me, so that I wanted to be with him to the end of the adventure. Do you understand? I wanted to be with him to the end.

Of course, I've learned since that that cool waiting for the right minute is the essence of Q-ship strategy. Danforth took me with him on his next trip, and once he had broken me in, they gave me a command of my own. But I shall never have such another adventure as that first one, because I shall never have such another chance to see the character and purpose of a man unfold as Danforth unfolded before me with the development of that extraordinary action.

I hope you understand what I mean. I hope I haven't bored you to death. But that's the story.

CHAPTER XXXII

RENFREW TAKES COMMAND

SQUADRON SEVENTY-SEVEN awaited a new commander. Seventy-seven was a scout squadron, flying S.E.5's from an airdrome near St. Omer. It was made up chiefly of Americans, who had come over to English training camps with a greater number of hours in the air to their credit than many a Royal Flying Corps man had run up after months of active service. They were expert flyers, and had been trained in aërial combat by no less a champion of the air than Preest, the premier ace of the British forces, who had selected them with infinite care. The pilots of Seventy-seven felt that their squadron was rivaled by no other on the western front.

Then, after breaking his squadron in, Preest had left them, to return to England and do as much for another group. The officers of Seventy-seven foregathered to consider the problem of whom they should ask for next. Squires, the lanky, tow-headed lad from Missouri was pessimistic.

"You ask me," he said, "and I'd say this war ain't all it's cracked up to be. Preest is a darn good scout, but you can't count on getting many more like him. I hear that some of these British officers are sons-of-guns for discipline."

"And washouts for flying, too!" cried Hanlon. "We've got to see that we get the right man!"

Squires gazed down upon his brother officer with a slight but humorous smile.

"Sure, send for a book of samples," he drawled.

Hanlon fired up. He was hair-trigger, Hanlon was; reckless, impulsive and proud. He lived on his nerve, and attacked the war with a colossal ambition and dare-devil bravery. He lived at high tension, and kept up that tension, like many who found the war more frightful than a sober man could bear, by stoking it with a great deal of strong drink.

"We've got to remember that we've had the best, that's all!" he said, his eyes flashing with excitement. "We're one of the best outfits in France, now, and the man who comands Seventy-seven has got to be the finest they've got!"

"How about McCudden, or Mannock, or Bishop?" asked Satterthwaite, sarcastically.

"That's the stuff!" cried Hanlon, losing the sarcasm in his excitement.

"Leave it to Cal!" cried Rivers. "He's right as they make 'em. We've got to go at this thing carefully. Let 'em know up at Headquarters that we rate the best C.O. in the Flying Corps. There's not a man in this outfit that can't fly circles around the general run of them, and with what we've picked up from old Preest there's no reason I can see that'll keep us from all being aces before this man's war is over."

"Now," said Squires, "you're all getting a lot ex-

cited. As I see it, we've been the victims of the prettiest piece of luck that any man ever walked into. Preest picked on us, because we were the first men over from the States. You can't tell me there ain't lots more just as good coming along all the time; but we were the first over, and he picked on us. Since we been over here, we've had a lot of tall combat practice, and we've been taught how to save our skins at the same time as we get our man. But you fellers don't seem to remember everything Preest set out to teach us by a long sight. You seem to have forgotten the most important thing we might have learned."

"All right, judge, get right up and tell the folks all about it," sang out Rivers. "The boys and girls will all listen to what Mr. Squires has to say." All this without a trace of malice, for, after three weeks at the front, malice does not exist among men who expect to die together.

"It's like this," said Squires, "you fellers seem to feel we're pretty hot turkey; that we got the edge, as Preest called it, on most all the aviators who ever swung a prop in France. That's because we've been getting away with murder on every trip over the lines that Preest has led. Whenever we met Fritz, we had the pleasure of seeing him shake his rattle at us and then fly home like a bat out of hoop-la. All the planes we ever brought down was herded up for us by Preest.

"All right. Now what we've learned from that seems to be that we're a pretty hot crowd of air men. Not so?"

"Say, Hank, where'd you find the anvil?"

It was Hanlon, rising in protest; and Rivers backed him.

"Cal's right, Hank. You sound like the last cab horse."

"Well, wait a minute," drawled Hank. "What I've said is just facts. That's all we seem to have learned. Now I'm going to tell you what we ought to have learned. Preest tried to teach us just as plain as ever a man spoke that we wasn't getting any war at all. Fritz knew just as well as we did that Preest was up in this part of the line, and for that reason, Fritz didn't show fight. If you go shooting off all this crack squadron stuff at Headquarters, they'll laugh at you a lot. The thing for us to do is to take whoever they give us. If we rate it, we'll get a good man, and if Preest puts in the report I think he will, we'll rate it."

Thereupon strife broke loose in the disheveled parlor of the château which was Seventy-seven's quarters. Hanlon and Rivers led a faction which was hot against Squires' policy of modest waiting, but Squires was strong, and Hanlon became gradually more excited and less coherent as he buttressed his arguments out of a bottle. In the end Squires won, and the trip to Headquarters which Hanlon and Rivers had planned was voted down under the weight of the Missourian's calm and measured advice. Squadron Seventy-seven decided to wait for whatever commander might be appointed for them, and Hanlon, Rivers and Company heatedly prophesied the worst.

"Just wait," said Hanlon, his black eyes smoldering. "The Britishers don't love us any too well for taking the war away from them. They'll give us one of your armchair flyers with a monocle in his eye, and we'll be the laughing stock of the Flying Corps."

"Or we'll get a hard-boiled disciplinarian, and have to live like nice little boys in school and then die before breakfast," said Rivers.

Three days after Preest had gone his way the officers of Seventy-seven were disturbed in their unaccustomed leisure by the appearance in the skies above them of a new and glittering S.E.5. It came thundering across the hangars and turned into the wind at the leeside of the field to make its landing; but it turned in too quickly, so that it could not land without overshooting the drome.

"A rookie," snapped Hanlon, excitedly. "That kid needs another ten hours on Avros."

"Gosh, what a turn!" criticized Satterthwaite, as the unfortunate pilot opened his throttle and skidded in a flat turn about the hangars. "If that had been a Camel, he'd have killed himself, sure."

Again the visitor turned, this time with more room than he needed. He shut off his motor and glided in toward the airdrome. Apparently seeing that he could not make it, he nosed up.

"Good gosh, he's going to stall her!" gasped Hanlon.

"Ah-h-h!" Squires slowly let his breath escape as he

saw the pilot open his throttle and spurt forward in a burst of speed.

"Bet it's a new recruit for us," cried Hanlon pessimistically. "That's the stuff they'll be giving us now that Preest's gone. Look at that!"

He snorted with disgust as the newcomer shut off his gas, put down his nose and plunged with startling speed toward the earth. Then he pulled up and the trim little machine dipped and rose and dipped again in a series of hops which varied from three to five feet above the ground. The machine at last lost flying speed and landed with a bump upon its wheels; it bounced—prettily and daintily enough to the eyes of any one who did not see in it the ugly indication of bad flying—and then it came to rest in a series of bounces and jolts which quickly changed to the lumbering pace at which its pilot taxied it toward the tarmac.

When the pilot alighted from his beautiful but abused little aircraft, he found himself surrounded by the grinning members of Seventy-seven Squadron who regarded him with sardonic but not unfriendly curiosity. To their surprise he was not a kid at all. Instead he was a young man whose countenance possessed that singular dignity which marked the faces of most men who had seen a great deal of the war. He was taller than common, and fair, having brows and lashes which, catching the sunlight, glittered yellow.

The officers of Seventy-seven hesitated in their greeting, for they had been prepared to tease good-naturedly an untried kid. Instead they found themselves con-

fronted by a veteran. They sensed that at once. Then a horrible thought occurred to Hanlon, and the newcomer immediately verified it by taking off his flying coat and revealing a major's crowns upon his shoulders.

"My name is Renfrew," he said. "I have come to take command."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

THE afternoon when Renfrew landed thus clumsily on the airdrome of Seventy-seven was the same afternoon when Dick Williams, in the parlance of the Flying Corps, killed himself.

With Cal Hanlon Dick went up to lead a wild game of follow the leader about the hangars, trees, and outbuildings which surrounded the airdrome. Williams came down and rolled his wheels on the grass of the airdrome, zoomed, half rolled so that his plane regained its equilibrium scarcely twelve feet above the ground and then shot straight at the hangar wall to sweep above it in a leap which gave him only inches to spare. Hanlon followed him. Williams turned sharply to the left end, dipping over the officer's quarters, spun about in a series of dizzy rolls, boring through space like a winged corkscrew. While the pilots of Seventy-seven watched from below, Hanlon still followed. Then Williams zoomed upward in a climbing turn which took him like a comet toward the sun, whipped around, and looped, whipping his machine upward from a steep dive for velocity. His wings snapped off as he turned over for a second loop, and Hanlon landed fifty yards from the smoking wreckage, to walk blindly into the mess and demand a drink.

Major Renfrew saw the death of Dick Williams through the windows of the orderly room. He was among those who reached the wreckage first, but while Dick's fellow pilots excitedly strove to help the R.A.M.C. men with their gruesome work, Renfrew stood back and gazed upon the scene with a thoughtful and melancholy gaze.

Before evening there was posted in Squadron Orders a command that there would be no stunting at the air-drome except by order, and then stunting would be done at an altitude not under one thousand feet.

Rivers stamped into the mess hall, filled with indignation.

"It's training school all over again!" he yelled. "This guy isn't a fighting man, he's a kindergarten teacher!"

"He probably thinks a fighting man's more useful before than after stunting," drawled Hank.

"How are we going to fight if we can't stunt?" cried Hanlon thickly. He was not going to forget the death of Dick Williams for the next fifty years of his life. "You'd better talk down, Hank. If you hadn't put your oar in, we'd have got a good man to lead us instead of this—" he paused for an adequate word.

"This ground hog!" he cried.

"Give him a chance," said Hank. "We ain't seen him in action yet."

"And never will, I'll bet!" sneered Hanlon.

He reminded Hank of that, later. He reminded him of it the next morning, as a matter of fact; while

they waited for dinner. They had come back from their first patrol with Renfrew. "Defensive patrol," the orders had read.

Renfrew had been the last man to get into his machine that morning. The rest of the squadron was out and tuning up their engines before he came out of the orderly room and strode over to his bright new plane. He examined the plane very carefully before he climbed into the cockpit and Hanlon, in the plane beside him, sat quivering with that high tension with which he faced every perilous action.

"Aw, climb in, it won't bite you!" he murmured under his breath; and he noticed with narrowed eyes all those indications of hesitation and reluctance which he had seen before in cadets who had failed to gain their wings. "The man's yellow," he repeated to himself bitterly. And he repeated it over and over again while Renfrew took his seat and warmed up his motor.

"Yellow! Yellow! Yellow!" he kept repeating, while his own hand trembled on the stick and he longed hysterically to get off the ground and into action. "What luck!"

Then they were off, and following Renfrew in a wide curve around the airdrome. Then up, in that beautiful, sky-seeking plunge at the clouds which only an S.E. with its mighty Hispano motor, could achieve. Up and over the lines, to sweep about in curves which Renfrew, oddly enough, made more neatly and sharply as he maneuvered in higher altitudes.

It was a defensive patrol. That is to say, they were

patrolling the lines to see that no enemy machine crossed over or operated to military advantage above the lines. It meant using their fuel in a flight up and down the lines instead of using it, as in offensive patrol, for an invasion of the enemy territory and the destruction of enemy planes.

But this meant nothing to Hanlon, Rivers, and Company. To those seekers of glory, every flight over the lines meant searching for trouble—hunting out the enemy and bringing down as many German planes as fuel and ammunition permitted. Thus, when, far to the eastward, Hanlon saw a formation of German scouts which climbed and circled high in the distance, he eagerly fingered the pressure handle of his synchronizing gear, and expected Renfrew to fly upon the enemy. Renfrew did nothing of the sort.

"He saw them all right. Of course he saw them!" Hanlon declared vehemently afterward. "That's why he turned. He turned their way, and then he got cold feet! I tell you he's yellow clean through!"

And the evidence bore him out. All the squadron testified to it, so that Squires could say nothing to defend his commander. Renfrew had certainly seen that formation of German scouts. Hanlon was not the only man who had seen him turn his head and deliberately examine them. He had kept on his way, however, while Hanlon, Rivers and Company fumed with a baffled lust for glory in his wake.

He had kept on his way, as a matter of fact, until he had the sun in his face and the wind on his right;

then he turned in as steep and clean a curve as could be wished for, and, with the sun behind him and and wind giving him a slight drift toward the quarry, he had pointed his nose, and the noses of his squadron, directly at the German formation.

It fled. Faced by superior numbers, which, they believed were led by the deadly Preest, the Germans turned homeward. But did Renfrew follow? In the privacy of his quarters Hanlon put the question hotly to his fellows. Did Renfrew follow? No. He took to climbing circles, and watched the retreating Germans as he climbed. Then, confident "that his skin was safe" as Hanlon put it, he led his squadron back to its patrol of the line.

Hanlon had rebelled at that, and for a moment had left the formation, as though to lead his flight whither Renfrew feared to go. But Renfrew had flipped across his bows as though he had seen Hanlon turn through eyes at the back of his head; and he had fired both barrels of his Very pistol in a signal which said "fall in." Fuming, Hanlon had taken his place again.

Then they had flown back, and, as they had circled the airdrome for their landing, Renfrew turned too soon in an ugly, skidding "flat-turn," so that it became Hanlon's privilege to save the squadron's necks by leading it again around the drome and washing it out to land in its own sweet way. When it landed, its every machine had to bring up close to the tarmac to avoid the wreckage of Renfrew's plane which was heaped in the center of the green. He had flattened

out twelve feet above the ground, and hit the turf with his engine roaring, as he had tried to overcome a stall.

His face was exceedingly white, and his eyes very grave, as he wandered over to the tarmac where the pilots were vaulting from their machines. He approached Hanlon.

"Thank you for taking them around again," he said quietly. "We'd have lost some machines, I'm afraid if they'd followed me down." Then, as Hanlon, with a grunt, turned away: "By the way, Hanlon, never leave a formation on an impulse. If we'd followed those Germans we'd have had to give up the patrol. When Wing Orders call for a defensive patrol, you must remember that they're counting on you to be there. Never give it up for pothunting."

Hanlon stared at him for a moment in dumb indignation. Then he hurried off to give vent to his rage in the privacy of his quarters.

"The rotten slacker had the nerve to strafe me for leading off after those Huns!" he cried. He said nothing of Renfrew's explanation, for he sensed that it might spoil the point he would make against Squires. "He can't fly, and he won't fight! He's so yellow that he botches his landings like a kid on a solo flight. He's rank, clear through."

"It's a fact, Squires," urged Rivers. "You can't argue against the showing he made this morning. You wouldn't let us speak for ourselves, and the result is, we've got a complete dud!"

Squires frowned at the ragged carpet.

"I don't know," he drawled. "There's something about this Renfrew, that don't stack up with the appraisal you're making."

"The only thing about him that I can see," said Satterthwaite, "is that he looks like a man, but can't deliver the goods."

There was a silence, and Squires could not fill it. Satterthwaite had been with him in the debate which preceded Renfrew's coming. It seemed that now, in championing Renfrew, he stood alone.

"Don't stick up for him just because you feel responsible for his coming here," said Hanlon.

Squires walked off across the airdrome with that phrase in his ears. He was thinking that Hanlon might have spoken more truly than he intended to. Perhaps his desire to find good in this new commander was established on nothing more than a desire to vindicate himself. He had heard a great deal about the pleasant, cautious British gentlemen who gained their wings and commissions without ever learning to fly—the "armchair" flyers who seldom got to the front—and Renfrew, it seemed, lived up to all the specifications.

He saw the bright orange and green fuselage of his own dainty plane standing outside the hangars and strolled over to see why it should be out on the tarmac. He found Renfrew standing beside it.

"Just the man I want," said Renfrew, smiling his greeting. "Hewitt has just gone over to ask you if I may use your bus."

The honest face of Lieutenant Squires fell. He was

very fond of his first active service machine. Renfrew saw his hesitation. He nodded.

"I know," he said. "And the fact is, I can't promise not to pile her up the same way as I did mine." He leaned on the leading edge of a lower wing and gazed off across the airdrome.

"It almost seems as if I'm through," he said. Squires started. Renfrew's voice had a low and genuine quality which pierced deeply under Squires' skin. Renfrew looked up at him, smiling a grave, thoughtful smile.

"It happens to most of us if we keep it up long enough," he explained. "You either get pipped or you lose your nerve. I've lost mine—my flying nerve, you know—can't judge my landings any more—feel as if I'm on the ground when I'm a hundred feet up. That's the handwriting on the wall."

Suddenly he stood erect, grinning broadly.

"But I must get over that," he said. "And the only way I know of getting over it, is to fly. I've got to take up a machine and practice hedge-hopping until I know my ground work again. I've got to use one of the squadron buses, and—well—I thought you were a fellow who might understand most readily what it was all about. See?"

Hank stared at him. He had done nothing else since Renfrew had started talking. He became conscious that Renfrew was waiting for an answer. He gulped and turned red.

"Why, sure, Major," he said. "It's all right with

me." Then, impulsively, "Say, but isn't it sort of—of dangerous?"

Renfrew tossed his head, giving his smile the quality of a laugh.

"Yes," he said. "That's a drawback to this whole darned war."

He turned back to the brilliant orange and green machine. Hank watched him as he ran up the motor and turned it over until he got temperature. Squires had not watched a take-off with so great a fascination since he had seen his comrades risk death on their first solo flights in Camels at the training school. He did not take his eyes from the green and orange beauty until he saw it roar down the airdrome, wabble in the air as it left the ground, skid out of the wind in a stalling turn, and disappear over the trees which filled the valley. Then he turned back to the château with a strange feeling of uneasiness. He was reproaching himself for having allowed Renfrew to ascend!

Squires wrote a letter to Preest that morning, asking his old commander to tell him what he could about Renfrew. Then he went over to the mess lounge, and found Hanlon sandwiching his drinks with withering rehearsals of Renfrew's shortcomings. When Squires entered Hanlon was telling about Renfrew's hesitation in getting off the ground, and Squires, hearing the exaggerated recital, found himself overcome with a rare gust of anger.

"Cal," he said, and the restrained voice of his anger

silenced the room, "I'm wondering how long it would take you and a lot more of us to climb into a bus, if we didn't get half drúnk first!" Then silence gave way to turmoil, and Squires left the room to avoid a brawl.

CHAPTER XXXIV

RENFREW'S PRACTICE FLIGHT

SQUADRON Seventy-seven was assembling for lunch twenty minutes later, when the first bomb fell. The antiaircraft guns gave them the warning, but it was a customary sound, and they ignored it until it gave way to a heavy droning in the air above the château, and a deafening detonation which set the old building rocking. In a rush they made for the doors and streamed out on to the airdrome in time to see the orderly hut go up in a vomit of earth and débris. A hail of shrapnel and splinters filled the air, dust blinded them, and the din and thunder of bombs and antiaircraft guns was deafening. Squires saw Manville, of C Flight, slump to the ground as he emerged from the château doorway. They flocked about him, and then suddenly, panic seized them. The pilots of Seventy-seven scattered in all directions, seeking cover. Squires saw that several of them picked Manville up, and he was about to follow them, but first he glanced into the air. Immediately, as though oblivious of the bombs and shrapnel which fell about him, he stood transfixed, staring upward.

He saw the weaving forms of the German bombers, dropping their pills of death from a height of nine

or ten thousand feet, and that sight would have sent him seeking cover. But off to the eastward he saw something else which moved in the sky. A tiny plane which caught the rays of the sun with the color of flame. His own plane, with Renfrew at the controls, speeding toward the doomed airdrome as a pigeon speeds home.

It caught at Squires' heart to think of Renfrew returning from that effort to control his tired nerves, to certain destruction, or to death. For the bombs were now blowing great holes in the turf of the airdrome. Only a master flyer could land in that chaos, and he would need good luck for his landing.

But Renfrew did not land. Squires saw him veer away to the south as he came in clear sight of the airdrome; and then, pulling up his nose, he dived in the magnificent zoom of an S.E.5 straight at the high noon sun.

Squires was now entirely oblivious to the bombardment. His heart and body, his nerve and mind were all on that fleeting flash of flame which streaked so gallantly and madly across the sky. Squires saw at once what Renfrew's purpose was. He would dash into the sun until he had climbed to a height above the bombers, and then with the sun at his back would plunge upon the enemy out of that dazzling light, and trust to the gods of war that they might be too preoccupied with their bombing to receive him.

"Come back here, you ole fool!" shrieked Hanlon from a cellar window.

"He's committin' suicide!" Squires yelled back insanely. "There ain't no man can get away with that!"

His eyes were glued to the tiny machine above him. He saw it turn as it became a speck against the sun, and he swore as the light blinded him for a moment to its movements. Then he saw it streak down, straight as a die, toward the bombers. There was a moment when silence reigned, as the bombs stopped dropping. Squires, who should have been in deathly fear of those drops of destruction, prayed that the Germans were not through, for if they were they could deal with Renfrew in a single volley of fire.

But they were not. They had come out to destroy the château which stood fifty yards behind Squires' back, and having so far missed it, they dipped, and came shooting down the air. When the bombs started dropping after that instant of silence, they fell into the motor park behind the château.

Squires hardly heard them, for his eyes were glued on the little plane which had dipped as well. It was droning now in a mad burst of speed, and still the Germans hadn't seen it. Squires found his nerves strained to a terrific tension so that his finger nails were pressed painfully against his palms. He saw the little orange plane pull up its nose as it seemed bound to pass beneath the bow of the leading German bomber. Then it bounced into the air and changed direction as the leading bomber veered from its course, spun into a dive and dropped like a stone to the earth.

But Squires didn't see its fall. The first burst of

Renfrew's gun fire came to him as the second burst was fired. He saw the bombers scatter, and then, as Renfrew's little machine plunged through the very center of the formation and swooped upward under it in a fine, curving zoom, another German plane dropped flaming in his wake. The bombers were scattered now, and Renfrew swooped about among them like a flaming hawk among geese.

"He's takin' them all on! All of 'em! It's suicide, but oh, it's a fight!"

Squires was yelling himself hoarse without knowing it, and his fellow officers, believing the raid over, came forth and joined him. They stood in groups and stared upward.

Renfrew was playing his old, effective game. With eyes for all about him, seeming to see above, below, behind and about all at the same time, he kept himself always with a bomber at his back. It demanded skilled flying, for always he must be close, too close for safety, to the enemies about him, and he moved at a hundred and twenty miles an hour. The officers of his squadron saw three bombers fall out of that seething group before Renfrew's little plane turned into a spinning, whirling bit of flame which writhed its way toward the earth.

"They got him!" cried Squires in a great voice. "By God, they got him!"

Then he was incontinently rushing for the hangars.

"Come on, you ground hogs!" he yelled. "We got to go up! We ought to have been up before!" He

was shrieking all this as he ran, stumbling across the battered surface of the drome. And then Hanlon cried out hysterically.

"Got him, nothing! Look! Look! Look!"

They all stood and looked, without breathing.

As Renfrew had spun downward two bombers followed him, spiraling down in a long glide. In this fashion they were able to keep up with his spin. When he came out of it, they would bring him down.

"Get into those machines!" shrieked Squires. "He ain't got a chance against two of them!"

And it was so. A single scout can fight twenty or thirty bombers for a limited time if he can break up their formation and hold his own—they get in each other's way—but he cannot fight two.

Somehow, anyhow, three pilots got into the air out of the seven who tried the take-off; Hanlon, Squires and Morton. They turned into the wind and got their direction just as Renfrew, at an altitude of three thousand feet, came out of his spin. Immediately the bombers fired. They missed, and Renfrew spun once more. He was down to seven hundred feet before Squires led his men into action. For some reason Squires had no desire to bring down those two planes; he was content to see them scurry away, striving for altitude as they flew. Then he turned to look for Renfrew, and Hanlon and Morton did likewise.

The airdrome was a mass of bomb craters now, and a man does not land at his best after a six thousand foot spin. They watched, and followed Renfrew down

as they watched him. He made his familiar skidding turn at the end of the drome, wavered between the craters which had torn the turf, tried for a line of green, overshot it, and landed five feet about a gaping hole. Squires saw the little orange colored plane crumple into the mud, and, catching his breath, he twitched his own stick sideways. Without control, he sideslipped away from his chosen landing. He saw the ground sweep up toward him from the right, and threw up his arm to protect his face. He crashed, and clambered from the wreckage to find the wreckage of the orange plane close at his side.

Renfrew was standing quietly beside his wreck. They rushed up to him, all the men of his squadron, but he did not seem to hear their excited chorus of glee and admiration. He was gazing ruefully at Squires.

"No use," he said. "It doesn't look as though I'll ever make a good landing again."

Hanlon was madly pumping his hand.

"Lord, Major," he cried, "My good heavens above! Oh, my gosh, Colonel! Oh, Lord!" And that was all he could say.

Two days later Squires received from Preest a letter which told him all about Renfrew. He read it aloud in the mess.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE RETURN OF THE SILVER PLANE

WHILE Renfrew was commanding Seventy-seven Squadron, news came to him that Bracher was back on the western front. He heard it as officers and men heard all such news in the war—through rumor—through some one who had heard it from some one else. It was as though a voice went rustling down the line from an unknown source, a voice which brought strange, twisted tales of things which had really happened; rumors of a great battle at sea in which the entire German High Seas Fleet was destroyed or the entire British Grand Fleet had gone down—that was the Battle of Jutland; rumors of a great host coming from America with more airplanes than all the armies had used in the war together; rumors of an armistice—the Germans were breaking down, the war was going to stop—and now this rumor of Bracher's coming back to the front.

Renfrew had learned to ignore all rumors until they were confirmed by fact, and this rumor he would especially have liked to ignore, but it stayed in his mind and worried him.

Through the strangest of war's strange fortunes, Bracher had become Renfrew's friend; and because a

man who witnesses every day the violent death of a friend cannot happily fight one to the death in the upper reaches of the sky, Renfrew had been glad in the feeling that Bracher was out of the war for good, comfortably interned in Holland. So he tried to assure himself that this rumor must be false, and that Bracher could not have escaped from his internment. But he could not put the probability out of his mind. It lurked in the recesses of his tired, war-weary soul, and worried him.

Then Hanlon, the most reckless of the squadron, came thundering home from a lone patrol with his machine all but shot to pieces. Renfrew, in the orderly hut, saw him land, and noticed at once the plane's riddled fabric. They were in the last autumn of the war, now, and the squadron was working at high pressure, keeping the air clear of enemy machines while the armies pressed relentlessly forward in Foch's great push for the Rhine. The squadron moved its quarters forward almost every night, so that there was little rest for them, and lacking sleep, they lived with frayed nerves and minds numbed by the heavy casualties in men and machines. Renfrew, seeing another machine ready for the scrap heap, added one more plane to his requisition for immediate equipment, and turned to hear Hanlon's excited report.

"Bracher's back all right!" cried the American pilot. He was quivering with the excitement of overwrought nerves. "And he's flying in this sector! He darn near brought me down!"

"How do you know it was Bracher?" Renfrew's voice was tired, because his body and his soul were tired, too. For three months now, Renfrew had been "through." That is, he had reached the limit of a man's ability to stand the strain of aërial warfare. Every take-off and every landing he made without confidence, calling upon all the power of his will to overcome the fear of a fatal crash. Every death he encountered was like a whip-lash upon his soul, and he was terribly conscious of the fact that his turn might at any time be next. Renfrew was through. He was fighting the fact, and driving himself to ignore it, but he knew that every day brought him nearer the end—to a breakdown on the ground, or to death in the air.

"How do you know it was Bracher?" he asked, and his voice was very tired.

"I don't, but this boy certainly answers the description. He flies a bus that's painted silver, and he flies it like a bird. Oh, man, but that boy can fly! He had another plane with him, and the way he used that little pal to lead me into his fire was something scandalous! They gave me all I wanted and more. The Germans can have all the air and all the land, too. If that's the kind of playmate they're going to give us, I'm not going to play!"

He rambled off to the bar for his inevitable drink, and left Renfrew staring at the wall.

At luncheon the squadron talked of nothing but the armistice. The Germans were giving way everywhere. All down the line Foch's great push was pressing them

back, folding them up like a jackknife, shutting up the doors to their escape. Squadron Seventy-seven worked with Rawlinson's Fourth Army, which included two American divisions. They were long since through the Hindenburg line. Le Cateau, upon which they had looked down from many an aërial combat, was now behind them. Landrecies and Avesnes, where, in 1914, French's doomed army had fought its desperate way against annihilation, were before them. To the north, Belgian and British forces, with the help of two more American divisions, were tearing Ludendorff's last hold away from the Belgian coast. To the south Pershing's doughboys were marching through the shell-swept forests of the Argonne, and storming a way to Metz. And the Germans were suing for peace.

That was the rumor, and Squadron Seventy-seven, frayed of nerve, hungry for rest and surcease from the wierd, incredible dangers of the air, greeted it with derision.

"They may want peace," cried Rivers, "but they won't get it! It's our innings, now, and we're going to push on to the Rhine."

"Atta boy," approved Squires. "Let 'em talk armistice all they want. What we've got to do, is to carry on till the last shot's fired. We should worry about talk!" Then his eye fell upon Renfrew who, talking lightly, laughing and chatting at the head of the table, could not quench the testimony of his eyes that he was through.

"It's going to mean a lot of good men gone west," said Hanlon, "for every day of fighting."

Squires gazed at him and thought suddenly how miserable he would feel if Hanlon went west. Or Renfrew . . . or Rivers, or Satterthwaite—no. Satterthwaite had been killed that morning. . . .

Suddenly Squires found himself ardently desiring the armistice and he did not know that Renfrew, up at the head of the table, was desiring nothing less. While the war lasted the days of his comrades were numbered, and peculiarly enough, the friend Renfrew feared for most was an enemy. His fear of a friend being killed was surpassed by the fear that this particular friend he might be called upon to kill with his own hands.

Before luncheon was over the orders had come for them to take up their quarters in an abandoned German airdrome outside Landrecies. For three hours they saw to the packing and entrainment of every movable thing, and then all who had machines flew forth for the new pinpoint on that changing map. They arrived at Landrecies in time to refuel and take the air for a patrol over the chaos of the advancing armies, and came back at dusk minus Hanlon and Rivers, to find orders for a new advance which robbed them of that night's sleep.

Day after day they battled, helping through aërial combat to advance the line, and then moving up behind it. The Germans, armed with the most powerful scouting plane the war had produced, fought bitterly and

desperately. The planes of both armies came down like wild ducks under the guns of the hunter.

There was no talk of armistice now. The squadron moved forward too fast and was in the air too often to keep in touch with rumor. It left rumor far behind at the rest camps and concentration centers. And yet Squadron Seventy-seven did not forget it. Squires did not forget. He had lived to see Rivers and Hanlon go down together, dead men, in flaming planes. Masterson and Ormsted alone were left of the boys who had come overseas with him, and he knew that every day of battle brought death closer to them. He wished he had never heard of the armistice. Without a thought for it, he would have accepted these things as necessary; but now, with that faint hope. . . . His eyes were always wandering to Renfrew, who could not forget that rumor, either.

Squires lived in a constant and horrible dread of the day when he would see Renfrew shot down, as the others had been. He knew that Renfrew's nerve was ready to snap at any moment, and if it snapped in a fight . . . Squires felt that he could never stand it. And Renfrew lived with a gathering dread that some day he would meet a silver plane in those shell-shattered spaces over the moving line. Bracher would not know him; Bracher would know nothing save that his fatherland was threatened with defeat. He would fight as all the German airmen were fighting—with a desperate and sacrificial courage. . . . Perhaps, thought Renfrew, that is how he would die. Bracher would attack

him, and in that fight, Bracher would win. A man cannot kill his friend.

On a cold autumn morning Squadron Seventy-seven staggered forth after four hours' sleep and crawled into its planes for another forward move. The squadron effects had gone forward the night before, and the new drome was to be ready for them up there behind the line. They would refuel there before the morning patrol.

They landed in a light ground fog before the sun was high, and Renfrew crashed his machine in the landing. When he appeared at breakfast, his body trembled as though he were chilled to the bone. He jumped like a startled cat when Ormsted unthinkingly slammed the mess-room door, and the fingers of his hand became suddenly limp, so that his coffee cup fell from them and clattered to the floor He looked up and saw Squires gazing steadily at him. Squires immediately dropped his eyes, but Renfrew smiled a crooked smile at what he had seen in the eyes of his friend from America. "You're through!" had been the message in Squires' eyes, and Renfrew continued to smile as he regarded his trembling hand and knew the truth.

"I'm through," he thought. In a way it came as a relief. This would be his last flight, his last engagement over the lines. He was through. He would never land without crashing after this last flight, and he would never fly again. . . . He was through.

He lingered over the breakfast table, and smoked a pipe, chatting with his officers as though the trembling

of his hand, the startled shock with which every abrupt sound smote his shattered nerves, were indications of the most normal condition a man might enjoy. But when, later, he stood beside his machine, something within him which was immensely powerful forbade him to climb in. He stood there in an agony of indecision.

"Fall ill," cried the voice within him. "Fall dead, if you like. But don't go up in that bus. It's death. It is the end. Don't go up. You're through!"

The pilots of his squadron sat in their machines and waited for him, their props ticking over. He stood and was suspended in a trance of hesitation.

"It may be death," he said to himself at last. "But the other's fear. I am going up with the morning patrol."

When he climbed into the cockpit it was as though he tore his limbs from invisible shackles for every movement which he made. It demanded a terrible concentration. As he started his engine a motor-cycle despatch rider roared into the airdrome from the road. Ordinarily Renfrew would have waited to see what message the man brought; but he could let nothing intrude upon his purpose. He took off in a mad series of dips and bounces, leaving the ground with one wing low and curving upward like a wounded goose.

It was a murky, foggy morning. The clouds hung low, and there was a haze on the face of the earth as though the dust of conflict had not settled in the wake of the moving armies. Renfrew, roaring through the

murky air felt neither excitement nor regret. He tried to relax in his cockpit and forget the distant grumble of the guns. This was his last flight—he felt convinced of that. He would never be able to fly again. The realization kept repeating itself in his mind.

Well, he had seen it through. He had done his best. Anyway he would be through, now, and the risk of meeting Bracher in the air would be a thing of the past. . . .

And then the morning sunlight caught with its rays a tiny speck in the eastern sky—a speck which shone silver against the gray clouds behind it. A silver plane which flew with a dozen others toward the lines.

Renfrew stared at it with unbelieving eyes. Bracher! His silver plane. . . .

"And after this flight," the words ran pitifully through Renfrew's weary mind, "after this flight I should never have flown again!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE BATTLE IN THE CLOUDS

THERE were six of them, sweeping at a hundred and twenty miles an hour toward that glittering enemy. Below them was a broken sea of clouds with wide spaces through which the checkered earth could be seen through strange and beautiful films of sunlight. Above them a broken canopy of gray moved in the swift current of their speed. The German machines which flew with Bracher came into sight as though they were produced by magic from the dim spaces behind their leader. They advanced at a greater speed than Renfrew's flight, for they were the new Fokkers, the finest and most powerful fighting plane which the war developed. In that strange land of clouds the winged enemies approached one another at a greater speed than man had ever traveled, and Renfrew knew it was too late to pretend that he had not sighted the enemy.

So he must fight. The only alternative was to pretend engine trouble and dive into the clouds below. But that would leave Squires and the rest to battle the deadly Bracher without him. He couldn't do that. And if he fought, the same problem would confront him. He could not take on Bracher and let him get

the best of it, as he desperately felt inclined, for that, too, would be a species of desertion. In the brief interval which reduced the distance between the combatants to fighting range, Renfrew made up his mind.

His hand did not tremble, now, and his nerves had ceased to jump and start at the back of his head. The need of the moment called upon him for control, and his spirit rose to answer it. He was cool and the master of his every movement as he led his flight in a curving, upward sweep to meet the enemy. And his eyes were fixed on Bracher's bright silver plane. He must isolate that silver plane: that was his resolve. He must herd Bracher out of the fight and take him on alone. What would occur then, he decided, must be left in the hands of the gods.

The Germans climbed faster than they, so that when they came within range, the enemy had the advantage of height. But Renfrew's nerves were serenely in his control now, and he possessed his old ability for not merely seeing the enemy, but feeling him. It was a singular faculty this, which served perhaps more completely than any other gift, to preserve the great fliers of the war and make them deadly.

You were not only able to fly your plane with great skill, measuring each twist and turn and evolution to the inch; you were not merely able to fire your machine gun with deadly accuracy by virtue of your able flying, but in addition to these gifts you were able to feel the position of your enemy, to know exactly where each maneuver you made would place him in relation to

yourself, and to be assured by that knowledge of what would be his blind spots. The "blind spots" of your adversary were those spaces of the air which were concealed from him by his wings or fuselage, and if you desired a protracted span of life in the Flying Corps, you studied each type of enemy machine to ascertain where those blind spots were. Knowing them, it remained for you to know in addition the maneuvering power of his plane; how fast he could climb, how quickly turn, what was the circumference of his loop, and at what angle he came out of any maneuver which he essayed. Added to that, you must have an eye to his zone of fire, for if you place yourself between the muzzle of his gun and one of his own machines, you greatly lessen his desire to shoot at you; and to all these items of acquired knowledge you must add the acquisition of "feeling"—a feeling for your adversary's mastery of his machine, a feeling for where you will be after a maneuver, and where your enemy will be as well. When he disappears from sight, you must know where you can pick him up again, and in every battle which you have you must be ready to avoid the fire of an enemy you cannot see—by feeling.

This feeling, established upon knowledge, Renfrew possessed in a high degree when his nerves were well in hand, and now he had them well in hand. As Bracher's machines dipped for the dive, and spread fanwise as they dipped, Renfrew led his flight into a wide curve beneath them. As soon as he judged that his curve had taken them from the enemy's view—for a

blind spot of the new Fokker was directly under its lower wing—he gave a signal with his left arm, and swept upward into an Immelman turn, which is a matter of shooting straight into the sky and twisting about in a single spin as the plane stalls. At the same time Squires and Ormsted divided behind him, half rolling to right and left. The other three planes went through the divided formation and half rolled, so that the whole flight had whipped itself about and faced the other way.

The Germans took the bait. They followed in their dive the line of Renfrew's wide curve, coming about in a great circle. In this manner Renfrew's machines were speeding westward after their sharp turn as the Germans described an arc about their straight pathway. It was only necessary for the British planes to turn sharply to the right, to cover the path of the German planes with their gun fire.

Squires, Ormsted and Masterson opened fire first. Two of them centered their fire across the path of a single Fokker, and the machine went to pieces in the air. Ormsted's fire brought another enemy twisting out of his path to bring his guns to bear, and in an instant the German formation scattered to come into action at a disadvantage—defensively.

In another moment the sky was full of whirling, fighting planes. Planes which appeared from the ground like wasps in conflict, rattling out death at one another in shrill, staccato volleys. They fought amidst clouds, so that those which were most skillful in aërial combat, used the clouds artfully, firing, twisting,

dipping into a cloud and diving out again to fire.

Squires found himself zooming at the sky to avoid a German who pounced upon him from behind. He zoomed blindly and found himself suddenly swathed in oblivion, as though a dark curtain had fallen upon him. In an instant he was out in the sunlight again, beyond the gray curtain, and he turned to see a German plane below him. He saw it through a lacy film of cloud which curled and wreathed between him and the enemy. Then he glimpsed Ormsted, hotly engaged in an effort to bring his guns to bear upon one who darted with incredible agility before him, and the Fokker which Squires had first seen through that filmy veil was poised to attack Ormsted from a point behind and above the unconscious warrior. Squires dived, so that the unfortunate German heard his gun fire while Squires was still enshrouded in the cloud. The German twisted, zooming upward and around, but Squires' gun discharged a stream of bullets through the body of his opponent while the poor fellow was still in that upward zoom. He threw his arms high in the air and turned toward his enemy a face which held the startled expression of his first surprise. Then his plane stalled and spun, and Squires was past him, roaring into the fray.

He found himself plunging into an alcove of cloudland. A large bay in a sea of space. To the west was open sky with a far flung view of the battle front where bursts of black smoke leapt from a haze of dust and gases. The guns rumbled and roared down there, and

a battery close beneath them gave forth a barking clamor which sounded strangely shrill and shocking against the hoarse grumble of the distant fighting. To the east were the clouds. Banks and billows of them, which, at this altitude opened in that bay, that alcove. Along the fringes of the clouds, the planes were fighting, and Squires would have turned his back upon that bay toward the hurrying, ghost-like forms which he saw flitting and weaving about to the south of him. But in the bay he heard a burst of machine gun fire, and he turned toward it, dipping through the cloudy curtain which barred him.

As he emerged from that curtain he saw two planes engaged in maneuvers which suggested oddly the play of romping puppies. One was a swift, silver plane which sparkled gayly in the diffused and moving rays of the sun. The other was a plane of his own squadron—Renfrew's plane.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE FIGHTER WHO JOKED WITH DEATH

RENFREW had singled out Bracher's plane from the first, and the circumstances of the fight had helped him to lead that gallant flyer from his comrades. In aërial combat it was always Bracher's custom to take on the best man among his opponents. He had seen Renfrew lead that skillful maneuver which had robbed him of the offensive, and when, his men scattering for the fray, Renfrew had singled him out, Bracher took him on with the gallant, dauntless confidence which led him in every battle to hazard his life on his ability to vanquish the best flyers which the Allies could produce.

But in this case it appeared that he had engaged an opponent who fought in the maddest manner which ever the skies had seen. Renfrew had plunged forward when the German flyers broke, to place himself between Bracher and the rest. It had seemed a suicidal plunge, for it apparently brought him directly across the field of Bracher's fire. But it was artfully conceived and artfully executed. The fact that it was unexpected had the effect of carrying Renfrew past Bracher's bows before Bracher got his guns in action, and also it had the effect of turning Bracher away from the fight.

Bracher had recognized that sudden, artful plunge as the tactics of a master, and for that reason he had taken up the battle. He would not have turned his back upon his men if he had not believed that this opponent represented the force which, all other things being equal, would decide which side would win. It was always Bracher's custom to get the best man among his opponents out of the way first.

So he twisted, to get on Renfrew's tail. And it was then that Renfrew began the tactics which caused the bewildered Bracher to suspect that he had taken on a madman. The German whirled about to get his enemy, and Renfrew looped. Bracher, ready for that loop, swung about so that he would be behind Renfrew when he came out of it. But at the top of his loop Renfrew did two complete rolls. He came out of them upside down and completed his loop. The result was that Bracher, who had swept under his looping antagonist, confident that Renfrew would come out of the loop in front of him, looked everywhere for his enemy and found him flying directly behind him.

Immediately it flashed through Bracher's mind that for an instant Renfrew must have had him squarely in his gunsight. But he had not fired. Bracher didn't give him another chance. He shot upward and fell out of it in a stalling turn. Renfrew shot by him, half rolled, and came back with Bracher speeding across his bows. Bracher, glimpsing the S.E.5 from the tail of his eye, saw his danger, and went over into an Immelman turn. As he saw the clouds and the earth spin

around him in the involutions of that turn, he realized that again his enemy had had a chance to get him, and again he had failed to fire. Then Bracher smiled to himself. His opponent's gun was jammed.

Bracher came out of his turn at the precise spot he had intended. It was aimed to bring him about into a position which, Renfrew having had to pass beneath him, would give him the opportunity of getting at Renfrew's rear. He traveled faster, and could climb faster than Renfrew could, and he knew only one way by which Renfrew could avoid him. That would be by a left turn which would bring him dangerously close to a collision. A right turn would only help Bracher the more easily to gain a firing position. Renfrew turned left, and climbed as he turned. Bracher shot past him in downward flight, missing him by a bare three feet. It was a maneuver which no skilled flyer would have indulged in without taking the opportunity of hitting his man with a burst of fire in that instant when Bracher crossed his bows. It would have been a burst at point-blank range, and could hardly have missed, but Bracher's strange enemy did not use it.

Then Bracher found himself flying at Renfrew's side. Side by side they flew, and Bracher realized with bewilderment that his opponent was pressing him to the north, away from the planes which indicated by bursts of fire the battle they fought behind the clouds which now separated these two duelists from the rest. Bracher's plane being the faster, they were not together for more than an instant. Then Bracher's back

was turned to his enemy, and he had to turn. He turned sharply, and climbed as he did so. Again he was conscious of the chance which his antagonist had lost. And he realized that his enemy was mocking him. The man's guns were not jammed, for he was making no effort to fix them. Bracher had seen nothing of his enemy as they had passed in that short distance, because his eyes had sought only for that fact. The man had not been occupied with his guns. He was playing with Bracher, herding him about the sky, mocking him.

When he realized this, Bracher's bewilderment gave way to anger. He swept about in a daring circle which took him high into the air. He turned down and saw his enemy striving to climb toward him, and then he dived.

At this time they were in an alcove of clouds, a wide bay, which was formed by banked clouds about them on three sides. The fourth side which looked to the west, whither the din of the armies which fought below came in a thunderous growl, was screened darkly from their clear vision by a thin film of vapor, through which the sunlight was filtered in a million varicolored rays. Directly under them a field battery was barking with a shrill, ear-shattering din.

To Bracher, as he dived, Renfrew was like a small, and dainty bird striving up toward him as a fledgling might strive to reach its heaven-seeking parent. Bracher knew then that he had his enemy at his mercy, because he could dive upon him and, diving, turn to

cover any direction by which Renfrew might seek to avoid him.

He dived a steep, daring dive. Such a dive as entrusted his life to the abused strength of his silver wings. He came down with the wind shrieking in his wires, at a speed nearly two hundred miles an hour. As he dived he fired the shots which brought Squires into that alcove of clouds, and at the first burst of his fire, he saw Renfrew dart aside, shooting across the clouds like a startled pheasant. Smiling with cold anger, Bracher brought up his nose and turned to follow. As he did so, praying that his wings might not collapse, he heard the rattle of a gun behind him, and caught in the tail of his eye, Squires' machine, roaring in through the fringes of vapor to the west.

Instantly he rolled away from Renfrew and swept about toward the newcomer. He thought at once that he divined his enemy's game. Renfrew had trapped him. Hot with rage, he flew at Squires with blind courage, ignoring the young American's efforts to bring him down.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE POINT OF THE JOKE

RENFREW had played his game well. Everything had favored his purpose. The clouds, the trend of the battle, and the evolutions of Bracher had all combined to help him engage the enemy's most deadly combatant, and at the same time spare that enemy. Until Bracher had lost his temper and thrown caution aside, Renfrew had managed to keep the game in his own hands. When Bracher made that daring sweep aloft, Renfrew was wondering at the back of his mind how this mad conflict was to end. He could not avoid Bracher's guns indefinitely, and his opponent would certainly show him no mercy in that instant when he brought his guns to bear. Already he had lost three chances to end the battle, and in combat with such a man as Bracher was, one such chance was generally all a man had.

And then Bracher had gained the advantage of him. He saw the German flyer go plunging up into the high heavens, and pulled up almost automatically to cover him. But again he could not fire. He remembered too well how Bracher had stood wounded in that Dutch meadow, and how the German lad had waved him in farewell. So he withheld his fire, and saw

Bracher make that daring dive. Immediately he darted away to the south, and it was in that instant that Squires appeared. Renfrew saw Squires fly into the battle, and his heart fell. He had resigned himself to the fact that this battle must in all probability end in his defeat and in his paying the price for defeat in the air; but he had not been prepared for this. He could not go down and let Squires face Bracher alone.

Like a shot he turned and swept down upon them, aiming for a point which would bring him between the combatants. Bracher saw his plane shoot forward, and Squires, also seeing it, turned as Bracher turned. The three planes swept about in three different circles; three beautiful forms skimming in exquisite curves among the clouds. And as they circled a peculiar thing occurred. Silence fell.

It was an odd silence. A silence which none of the flyers had known in their winged flight over the lines. It was a silence which made the roar of their motors to sound like an intolerable din. A silence which suggested an infinite and impenetrable peace.

Renfrew, who caught a glimpse of the distant lines as he swung about in that wide circle, saw that at the same time as silence fell, the black bursts which had accompanied the din of the battle below them, disappeared. The guns had stopped their fire. The barking, thunderclap of the battery below them had fallen silent. For the first time in five years not a gun was heard upon the western front. And rockets were as-

cending through the clouds; red rockets which filled the air with the semblance of a holiday.

Then, violently, the silence was broken by the rattle of machine gun fire. It had lasted only an instant—and then that deathly rattle. Instantly Renfrew heard the snap of bullets through his fabric, and felt the jolt of his engine as the misty circle of his propeller's spin gave way to a shattered stump which spun queerly about in front of him. His nose dipped. His engine stopped as he switched off, and in stillness which was only broken by the receding drone of the planes above him, he started to glide earthward.

As he sailed quietly down, the wind whistling in his wires, he was conscious of the serenity of all the earth and sky. It was as though the war had stopped.

With that thought he realized the truth. The war *had* stopped. This was the armistice.

With that came a sudden relaxation of his tense nerves, and with relaxation they gave way. The glide earthward was filled with an unutterable agony of doubt. Could he land? Supposing after all this weary horror of the war he was to be killed after peace was declared, in landing.

Carefully he saw to it that his switch was off—if he crashed he must not catch fire. Then he examined anxiously the land below him, and was filled with a thousand doubts. Finally he headed for a field he thought would do, but he changed his mind in favor of another when he was scarcely a thousand feet above the ground. That should have given him the better

part of a mile to maneuver in, but his nerve was gone, you understand. He was almost as helpless at his controls as a man who had never ascended before.

He changed his direction, hesitated between the two landing places. Looked hurriedly at a whisp of smoke for wind direction, headed for his chosen field, caught sight of the smoke again, and saw that its direction had changed. He had made the tyro's error of taking his wind direction from a moving train. Hastily he scanned the landscape for some indication of which way the wind blew. He found it in the ripples of a sheet of water, but he was low now, without power, and on the wrong side of the field. Desperately he turned for the field beside it, and came down in a side slip. As he crashed to the earth he saw a swift form skim over the wall beside him, and when Squires landed an instant later he found Bracher helping Renfrew out of his shattered plane.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" Bracher was saying. "Oh, it is terrible! It is horrible that it should have been you. My friend. My comrade, who could so easily have shot me."

He spoke with a strong German accent, for he was deeply moved. Squires gazed upon the blunt, honest face of the German youth, and felt moved with him.

"He was my friend!" explained Bracher earnestly. "Again and again he could have shot me down, but he did not. And I—" his voice was filled with disgust at himself. "I thought he was playing with me. Then

I shot him down after the moment of peace. And I knew that moment was come!"

Renfrew, his face white as paper, stared at Bracher with an odd expression of humor. Later he would learn that the motor-cycle orderly whose message he had not waited to hear had brought the news that the war would stop that morning; but now he could not comprehend that it had stopped when it did for any other reason than this:

"It didn't stop a minute too soon," he said, his lips twitching at the rich humor of it. "It would have its little joke at the end."

They all stared at one another. Then they laughed.

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHAT WAS LEFT

THE silence which had marked the end of the war had possessed the quality of terminating existence. The men who experienced that sudden cessation of hostilities, experienced at the same time a sudden cessation of everything they had been living for. They had thrown themselves so ardently into the adventure of the war that they had expected nothing but death to terminate it for them; and to find it now terminated with their life still left them was a bewildering experience.

Renfrew found himself in a few brief days invalided out of the Air Force and aboard a C.P.R. liner bound for home. He stood on the deck in the mild December weather, and gazed off across the heaving body of the North Atlantic, striving to realize that it was over—the fear, and the killing, the adventure, the comradeships, and the horror of the war were past. The war, which had filled his life for four full years, was gone, as those men who had crossed the seas with him were gone.

He gazed at the ocean, and thought that it was like an illimitable floor of hammered iron magically invested with life. It heaved and tossed in mountainous

swells, so that the deck beneath him arose and fell as though the great liner were a small boat at the mercy of the sea. He swayed with the movement of the ship, and the thought ran through his mind that he was himself the plaything of the winds and tides, his purpose once more taken away from him. The war was over, and he could conceive of no purpose or incentive which could replace that gigantic struggle and achievement. He was a hero now, in a world which had no use for heroes.

He turned to Commander Charles Mordaunt, who also was returning to Canada, the red ribbon for valor sewn to the breast of his dark blue coat.

"There doesn't seem to be much left, now," he said, and his lips curled in the quiet, tired smile which had become characteristic of him since he had first gone to hospital. "All the adventures seem to belong to yesterday."

Mordaunt answered the smile with a dauntless grin.

"I don't know," he said. "A man can still find things to look forward to. Things to fight for, I mean. To—you know—to accomplish."

"But not the adventure. The war's killed that. It's going to be the beaten way, after this, Charlie, my lad; and Lord only knows what a man's going to find to do in it."

Mordaunt still wore his dauntless grin.

"Well," he said, "when this boat lands at Quebec you can get on a train at the dock and travel for two days and nights through farmlands, woodlands, and

prairies. Then you can travel for two days and nights over prairies and through ranges of mountains; and from the train you can see swathes of country where man has never placed a foot. Then you can get on a boat and sail over to China. And all that line of steel and shipping is in the hands of one group of men who have conceived it and planned it and built it and operate it. And the thing they planned isn't even half done, because the thing they planned was to make a wilderness into a happy land full of prosperous people, and the transportation that will see it through will extend to hundreds and thousands of more miles of railway through country that's still a howling wilderness, and they'll have planes and power plants to play with before they're through."

He turned upon Renfrew a face which was alight with the dream he dealt with, and Renfrew knew that it was such dreams as brought that light to Mordaunt's eyes that had spanned a continent with steel lines of railway. But Renfrew felt very tired, and he could only envy the younger man his dream.

"There's the adventure for you!" cried Charlie Mordaunt. "There's action and accomplishment to fight for! And it's well away from your beaten path, as well. If you're looking for me in the years to come, Doug, why come out into the Northwest, and you'll find me building railways there. Or, for the matter of that, come on out with me now!"

But Renfrew shook his head.

"No," said he. "You go on out to your new and

shining adventures. I'm going back to the adventures we had before the war began. I shall remember them, and put them down on paper, and I'll be a writing man. Then, when all the old adventures are written down, and I've made a spot to hang my hat in, I'll come out and write of your new adventures for you."

"And will you write about the adventures we have had in the war?" asked Mordaunt.

"No," said Renfrew, "those stories will never be written."

Which proved him to be an indifferent prophet but a worthy soldier. And after all, those words which he exchanged with Charlie Mordaunt on the boat deck of the C.P.R. liner as they came back from the war, explained more clearly than many other words could do how it was that while Charlie Mordaunt made his way into the west to run railways and clear forest lands, Renfrew found his way to Walney, that suburb of a great city, where in intervals between the hours when he worked on his stories, he told to a fortunate group of boys the stories which are here set down.

THE END

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●

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